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BURNS AND HIS POETRY:

AN ESSAY

ON HIS LIFE AND GENIUS,

WITH QUOTATIONS OF THE BEST PASSAGES,

BY

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"THE CHRISTOPHER NORTH OF BLACKWOOD."

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ON THE
GENIUS AND CHARACTER OF BURNS.

BY PROFESSOR WILSON.

BURNS is by far the greatest poet that ever sprung from the bosom of the people, and lived and died in an humble condition. Indeed, no country in the world but Scotland could have produced such a man; and he will be for ever regarded as the glorious representative of the genius of his country. He was born a poet, if ever man was, and to his native genius alone is owing the perpetuity of his fame. For he manifestly had never very deeply studied poetry as an art, nor reasoned much about its principles, nor looked abroad with the wide ken of intellect for objects and subjects on which to pour out his inspiration. The condition of the peasantry of Scotland, the happiest, perhaps, that providence ever allowed to the children of labor, was not surveyed and speculated on by him as the field of poetry, but as the field of his own existence; and he chronicled the events that passed there, not merely as food for his imagination as a poet, but as food for his heart as a man. Hence, when inspired to compose poetry, poetry came gushing up from the well of his human affections, and he had nothing more to do, than to pour it, like streams irrigating a meadow, in many a cheerful tide over the drooping flowers and fading verdure of life. Imbued with vivid perceptions, warm feelings, and strong

passions, he sent his own existence into that of all things, animate and inanimate, around him; and not an occurrence in hamlet, village, or town, affecting in any way the happiness of the human heart, but roused as keen an interest in the soul of Burns, and as genial a sympathy, as if it had immediately concerned himself and his own individual welfare. Most other poets of rural life have looked on it through the aerial veil of imagination—often beautified, no doubt, by such partial concealment, and beaming with a misty softness more delicate than the truth. But Burns would not thus indulge his fancy where he had felt—felt so poignantly, all the agonies and all the transports of life. He looked around him, and when he saw the smoke of the cottage rising up quietly and unbroken to heaven, he knew, for he had seen and blessed it, the quiet joy and unbroken contentment that slept below; and when he saw it driven and dispersed by the winds, he knew also but too well, for too sorely had he felt them, those agitations and disturbances which had shook him till he wept on his chaff bed. In reading his poetry, therefore, we know what unsubstantial dreams are all those of the golden age. But bliss beams upon us with a more subduing brightness through the dim melancholy that shrouds lowly life; and when the peasant Burns rises up in his might as Burns the poet, and is seen to derive all that might from the life which at this hour the peasantry of Scotland are leading, our hearts leap within us, because that such is our country, and such the nobility of her children. There is no delusion, no affectation, no exaggeration, no falsehood in the spirit of Burns's poetry. He rejoices like an untamed enthusiast, and he weeps like a prostrate penitent. In joy and in grief the whole man appears: some of his finest effusions were poured out before he left the fields of his childhood, and when he scarcely hoped for other auditors than his own heart, and the simple dwellers of the hamlet. He wrote not to please or surprise others—we speak of those first effusions—but in his own creative delight; and even after he had discovered his power to kindle the sparks of nature wherever they slumbered, the effect to be produced seldom seems to have been considered by him, assured that his poetry could not fail to produce the same pas-

sion in the hearts of other men from which it boiled over in his own. Out of himself, and beyond his own nearest and dearest concerns, he well could, but he did not much love often or long to go. His imagination wanted not wings broad and strong for highest flights. But he was most at home when walking on this earth, through this world, even along the banks and braes of the streams of Coila. It seems as if his muse were loth to admit almost any thought, feeling, image, drawn from any other region than his native district—the hearth-stone of his father's hut—the still or troubled chamber of his own generous and passionate bosom. Dear to him the jocund laughter of the reapers on the corn-field, the tears and sighs which his own strains had won from the children of nature enjoying the mid-day hour of rest beneath the shadow of the hedgerow tree. With what pathetic personal power, from all the circumstances of his character and condition, do many of his humblest lines affect us! Often, too often, as we hear him singing, we think that we see him suffering! “Most musical, most melancholy” he often is, even in his merriment! In him, alas! the transports of inspiration are but too closely allied with reality's kindred agonies! The strings of his lyre sometimes yield their finest music to the sighs of remorse or repentance. Whatever, therefore, be the faults or defects of the poetry of Burns—and no doubt it has many—it has, beyond all that ever was written, this greatest of all merits, intense, life-pervading, and life-breathing truth.

There is probably not a human being come to the years of understanding in all Scotland, who has not heard of the name of Robert Burns. It is, indeed, a household word. His poems are found lying in almost every cottage in the country, on the “window sole” of the kitchen, spence, or parlor; and in the town-dwellings of the industrious poor, if books belong to the family at all, you are pretty sure to see there the dear Ayrshire Ploughman. The father or mother, born and long bred, perhaps, among banks and braes, possesses, in that small volume, a talisman that awakens in a moment all the sweet visions of the past, and that can crowd the dim abode of hard-working poverty, with a world of dear rural remembrances that awaken not repining but contentment.

No poet ever lived more constantly and more intimately in the hearts of a people. With their mirth, or with their melancholy, how often do his "native wood-notes wild" affect the sitters by the ingles of low-roofed homes, till their hearts overflow with feelings that place them on a level, as moral creatures, with the most enlightened in the land, and more than reconcile them with, make them proud of, the condition assigned them by Providence! There they see with pride the reflection of the character and condition of their own order. That pride is one of the best natural props of poverty; for, supported by it, the poor envy not the rich. They exult to know and to feel that they have had treasures bequeathed to them by one of themselves—treasures of the heart, the intellect, the fancy, and the imagination, of which the possession and the enjoyment are one and the same, as long as they preserve their integrity and their independence. The poor man, as he speaks of Robert Burns, always holds up his head and regards you with an elated look. A tender thought of the "Cottar's Saturday Night," or a bold thought of "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," may come across him; and he who in such a spirit loves home and country, by whose side may he not walk an equal in the broad eye of day as it shines over our Scottish hills? This is true popularity. Thus interpreted, the word sounds well, and recovers its ancient meaning. The land "made blithe with plough and harrow,"—the broomy or the heathery braes—the holms by the river's side—the forest where the woodman's ringing axe no more disturbs the cushat—the deep dell where all day long sits solitary plaided boy or girl watching the kine or the sheep—the moorland hut without any garden—the lowland cottage, whose garden glows like a very orchard, when crimsoned with fruit-blossoms most beautiful to behold—the sylvan homestead sending its reek aloft over the huge sycamore that blackens on the hill-side—the straw-roofed village gathering with small bright crofts its many white gable-ends round and about the modest manse, and the kirk-spire covered with the pine-tree that shadows its horologe—the small, quiet, half-slatted half-thatched rural town,—there resides, and will for ever reside, the immortal genius of Burns. Oh, that he, the prevailing Poet, could have seen this light

breaking in upon the darkness that did too long and too deeply overshadow his lot! Some glorious glimpses of it his prophetic soul did see; witness "The Vision," or that somewhat humbler but yet high strain, in which, bethinking him of the undefined aspirations of his boyhood he said to himself—

"Even then a wish, I mind its power,
A wish that to my latest hour,
Shall strongly heave my breast,
That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some useful plan or book would make,
Or sing a sang at least!

"The rough bur-thistle spreading wide
Amang the bearded bear,
I turned the weeder-clips aside
And spared the symbol dear."

Such hopes were with him in his "bright and shining youth," surrounded as it was with toil and trouble that could not bend his brow from its natural upward inclination to the sky; and such hopes, let us doubt it not, were also with him in his dark and faded prime, when life's lamp burned low indeed, and he was willing at last, early as it was, to shut his eyes on this dearly beloved but sorely distracting world.

With what strong and steady enthusiasm is the anniversary of Burns's birth-day celebrated, not only all over his own native land, but in every country to which an adventurous spirit has carried her sons! On such occasions, nationality is a virtue. For what else is the "Memory of Burns," but the memory of all that dignifies and adorns the region that gave him birth? Not till that region is shorn of all its beams—its honesty, its independence, its moral worth, its genius, and its piety, will the name of Burns

"Die on her ear, a faint unheeded sound."

But it has an immortal life in the hearts of young and old, whether sitting at gloaming by the ingle-side, or on the stone seat in the open air, as the sun is going down, or walking among the summer mists on the mountain, or the blinding winter snows.

In the life of the poor there is an unchanging and a preserving spirit. The great elementary feelings of human nature there disdain fluctuating fashions ; there pain and pleasure are alike permanent in their outward shows as in their inward emotions ; there the language of passion never grows obsolete ; and at the same passage you hear the child sobbing at the knee of her grandame whose old eyes are somewhat dimmer than usual with a haze that seems almost to be of tears. Therefore, the poetry of Burns will continue to charm, as long as Nith flows, Criffel is green, and the bonny blue of the sky of Scotland meets with that in the eyes of her maidens, as they walk up and down her hills silent or singing to kirk or market.

Let us picture to ourselves the Household in which Burns grew up to manhood, shifting its place without much changing its condition, from first to last always fighting against fortune, experiencing the evil and the good of poverty, and in the sight of men obscure. His father may be said to have been an elderly man when Robert was born, for he was within a few years of forty, and had always led a life of labor ; and labor it is that wastes away the stubbornest strength—among the tillers of the earth a stern ally of time. “His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare” at an age when many a forehead hardly shows a wrinkle, and when thick locks cluster darkly round the temples of easy living men. The sire who “turns o’er wi’ patriarchal pride the big Ha-Bible,” is indeed well-stricken in years, but he is not an old man, for

“The expectant *wee things* toddlin’, stacher through
To meet their dad wi’ flichterin’ noise and glee ;
His wee bit ingle, blinking bonnily ;
His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wifie’s smile,
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
Does a’ his weary carking cares beguile,
And makes him quite forget his labor and his toil.”

That picture, Burns, as all the world knows, drew from his father. He was himself, in imagination, again one of the “wee things” that ran to meet him ; and “the priest-like father” had long worn that aspect before the poet’s eyes, though he died before he was threescore. “I have always considered William

Burnes," says the simple-minded, tender-hearted Murdoch, "as by far the best of the human race that ever I had the pleasure of being acquainted with, and many a worthy character I have known. He was a tender and affectionate father; he took pleasure in leading his children in the paths of virtue, not in driving them, as some people do, to the performance of duties to which they themselves are averse. He took care to find fault very seldom; and, therefore, when he did rebuke, he was listened to with a kind of reverential awe. I must not pretend to give you a description of all the manly qualities, the rational and Christian virtues, of the venerable William Burnes. I shall only add that he practised every known duty, and avoided everything that was criminal; or, in the apostle's words, 'herein did he exercise himself, in living a life void of offence towards God and towards man.' Although I cannot do justice to the character of this worthy man, yet you will perceive, from these few particulars, what kind of a person had the principal part in the education of the poet." Burns was as happy in a mother, whom, in countenance, it is said he resembled; and as sons and daughters were born, we think of the "auld clay biggin" more and more alive with cheerfulness and peace.

His childhood, then, was a happy one, secured from all evil influences and open to all good, in the guardianship of religious parental love. Not a boy in Scotland had a better education. For a few months, when in his sixth year, he was at a small school at Alloway Miln, about a mile from the house in which he was born; and for two years after under the tuition of good John Murdoch, a young scholar whom William Burnes and four or five neighbors engaged to supply the place of the schoolmaster, who had been removed to another situation, lodging him, as is still the custom in some country places, by turns in their own houses. "The earliest composition I recollect taking pleasure in, was the *Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's, beginning '*How are thy servants bless'd, O Lord!*' I particularly remember one half stanza which was music to my boyish ear,

'For though on dreadful whirls we hang,
High on the broken wave'

I met with these pieces in *Mason's English Collection*, one of my school-books. The two first books I ever read in print, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were the *Life of Hannibal*, and the *History of Sir William Wallace*. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wished myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a tide of Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest." And speaking of the same period and books to Mrs. Dunlop, he says, "For several of my earlier years I had few other authors; and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious vocations of the day, to shed a tear over their glorious but unfortunate stories. In these boyish days, I remember, in particular, being struck with that part of Wallace's story, where these lines occur—

‘Syne to the Leglen wood, when it was late,
To make a silent and a safe retreat.’

I chose a fine summer Sunday, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half a dozen miles to pay my respects to the Leglen wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged." Murdoch continued his instructions until the family had been about two years at Mount Oliphant, and there being no school near us, says Gilbert Burns, and our services being already useful on the farm, "my father undertook to teach us arithmetic on the winter nights by candle-light; and in this way my two elder sisters received all the education they ever had." Robert was then in his ninth year, and had owed much, he tells us, to "an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witchies, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantrips, giants and enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect

on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out on suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors."

We said, that not a boy in Scotland had a better education than Robert Burns, and we do not doubt that you will agree with us; for, in addition to all that may be contained in those sources of useful and entertaining knowledge, he had been taught to read, not only in the *Spelling Book*, and *Fisher's English Grammar*, and *The Vision of Mirza*, and *Addison's Hymns*, and *Titus Andronicus* (though on Lavinia's entrance "with her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out," he threatened to burn the book); but in THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE BIBLE, and all this in his father's house, or in the houses of the neighbors; happy as the day was long, or the night, and in the midst of happiness; yet even then, sometimes saddened, no doubt, to see something more than solemnity or awfulness on his father's face, that was always turned kindly towards the children, but seldom wore a smile.

Wordsworth had these memorials in his mind when he was conceiving the boyhood of the Pedlar in his great poem, the *Excursion*.

"But eagerly he read and read again,
Whate'er the minister's old shelf supplied;
The life and death of martyrs, who sustained
With will inflexible, those fearful pangs
Triumphantly displayed in records left
Of persecution, and the covenant, times
Whose echo rings through Scotland to this hour;
And there, by lucky hap, had been preserved
A straggling volume, torn and incomplete,
That left half-told the preternatural tale,
Romance of giants, chronicle of fiends,
Profuse in garniture of wooden cuts
Strange and uncouth; dire faces, figures dire,
Sharp-knee'd, sharp-elbowed, and lean-angled too,
With long and ghastly shanks—forms which once seen
Could never be forgotten. In his heart
Where fear sate thus, a cherished visitant,
Was wanting yet the pure delight of love

By sound diffused, or by the breathing air,
Or by the silent looks of happy things,
Or flowing from the universal face
Of earth and sky. But he had felt the power
Of nature, and already was prepared,
By his intense conceptions, to receive
Deeply the lesson deep of love, which he
Whom nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely, cannot but receive.
SUCH WAS THE BOY.

Such was the boy ; but his studies had now to be pursued by fits and snatches, and, therefore, the more eagerly and earnestly, during the intervals or at the close of labor, that before his thirteenth year had become constant and severe. "The cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave !" These are his own memorable words, and they spoke the truth. "For nothing could be more retired," says Gilbert, "than our general manner of living at Mount Oliphant ; we scarcely saw any but members of our own family. There were no boys of our own age, or near it, in the neighborhood." They all worked hard from morning to night, and Robert hardest of them all. At fifteen he was the principal laborer on the farm, and relieved his father from holding the plough. Two years before he had assisted in thrashing the crop of corn. The two noble brothers saw with anguish the old man breaking down before their eyes ; nevertheless assuredly, though they knew it not, they were the happiest boys "the evening sun went down upon." "True," as Gilbert tells us, "I doubt not but the hard labor and sorrow of this period of his life was in a great measure the cause of that depression of spirits with which Robert was so often afflicted through his whole life afterwards. At this time he was almost constantly afflicted in the evenings with a dull head-ache, which at a future period of his life was exchanged for a palpitation of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed in the night-time." Nevertheless, assuredly both boys were happy, and Robert the happier of the two ; for if he had not been so, why did he not go to sea ? Because he loved his parents too well to be able to leave them, and because, too, it was his duty to stay by them, were he to drop down at midnight in

the barn and die with the flail in his hand. But if love and duty cannot make a boy happy, what can? Passion, genius, a teeming brain, a palpitating heart, and a soul of fire. These too were his, and idle would have been her tears, had Pity wept for young Robert Burns.

Was he not hungry for knowledge from a child? During these very years he was devouring it; and soon the dawn grew day. "My father," says Gilbert, "was for some time the only companion we had. He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us, as if we had been men; and was at great pains, while we accompanied him in the labors of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge, or confirm us in virtuous habits. He borrowed Salmon's Geographical Grammar for us, and endeavored to make us acquainted with the situation and history of the different countries in the world; while from a book society in Ayr, he procured for us the reading of Durham's Physico and Astro Theology, and Ray's Wisdom of God in the Creation. Robert read all these books with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled. My father had been a subscriber to Stackhouse's History of the Bible. From this Robert collected a competent knowledge of ancient history; *for no book was so voluminous as to slacken his industry, or so antiquated as to damp his researches.*" He kept reading too at the Spectator, Pope and Pope's Homer, some plays of Shakspeare, Boyle's Lectures, Locke on the Human Understanding, Hervey's Meditations, Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, the works of Allan Ramsay and Smollet, and A COLLECTION OF SONGS. "That volume was my *Vade Mecum*. I pored over them, during my work, or walking to labor, song by song, verse by verse, carefully noticing the true tender or sublime from affectation or fustian; and I am convinced I owe to this practice most of my critic-craft, such as it is."

So much for book-knowledge; but what of the kind that is born within every boy's own bosom, and grows there till often that bosom feels as if it would burst? To Mr. Murdoch, Gilbert always appeared to possess a more lively imagination, and to be more of a wit than Robert. Yet imagination or wit he had none. His face said, "Mirth, with thee I mean to live;" yet he was

through life sedate. Robert himself says that in childhood he was by no means a favorite with anybody—but he must have been mistaken; and “the stubborn sturdy something in his disposition” hindered him from seeing how much he was loved. The tutor tells us he had no ear for music, and could not be taught a psalm tune! Nobody could have supposed that he was ever to be a poet! But nobody knew anything about him—nor did he know much about himself; till Nature, who had long kept, chose to reveal, her own secret.

“You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labor of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language; she was a *bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass*. In short, she altogether, unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and bookworm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our sweetest blessing here below. How she caught the contagion I could not tell: you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, &c., but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labors; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Eolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand, to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sang sweetly; and it was a favorite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sang a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird’s son, on one of his father’s maids with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living on the moorlands, he had no more scholar craft than myself. **THUS WITH ME BEGAN LOVE AND POETRY.**”

And during those seven years, when his life was “the cheer-

less gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave," think ye not that the boy Poet was happy, merely because he had the blue sky over his head, and the green earth beneath his feet? He who ere long invested the most common of all the wild-flowers of the earth with immortal beauty to all eyes, far beyond that of the rarest, till a tear as of pity might fall down manly cheeks on the dew-drop nature gathers on its "snawie bosom, sunward spread!"

"Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower,
Thou's met me in an evil hour;
For I maun crush amang the stoure
Thy slender stem;
To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
Thou bonnie gem."

"Alas! it's no thy neebor sweet,
The bonnie Lark, companion meet,
Bending thee 'mang the dewy weat!
Wi' speckled breast,
When upward-springing, blythe to greet
The purpling east."

Thus far the life of this wonderful being is blameless—thus far it is a life of virtue. Let each season, with him and with all men, have its due meed of love and praise—and, therefore, let us all delight to declare how beautiful was the Spring! And was there in all those bright and bold blossoms a fallacious promise? Certainly not of the fruits of genius; for these far surpassed what the most hopeful could have predicted of the full-grown tree. But did the character of the man belie that of the boy? Was it manifested at last, either that the moral being had undergone some fatal change reaching to the core, or that it had been from the first hollow, and that these noble-seeming virtues had been delusions all?

The age of puberty has passed with its burning but blameless loves, and Robert Burns is now a man. Other seven years of the same kind of life as at Mount Oliphant, he enjoys and suffers at Lochlea. It is sad to think that his boyhood should have been so heavily burthened; but we look with no such thoughts on his manhood, for his strength is knit, and the sinews of soul

and body are equal to their work. He still lives in his father's house, and he still upholds it; he still reverences his father's eyes that are upon him; and he is still a dutiful son—certainly not a prodigal. "During the whole of the time we lived at Lochlea with my father, he allowed my brother and me such wages for our labor as he gave to other laborers, as a part of which, every article of our clothing manufactured in the family was regularly accounted for. When my father's affairs were near a crisis, Robert and I took the farm of Mossgiel, consisting of 118 acres, at £90 per annum, as an asylum for the family in case of the worst. It was stocked by the property and individual savings of the whole family, and was a joint concern among us. Every member of the family was allowed ordinary wages for the labor he performed on the farm. My brother's allowance and mine, was £7 per annum each, and during the whole time this family concern lasted, which was four years, as well as during the preceding period at Lochlea, his expenses never in one year exceeded his slender income. As I was intrusted with the keeping of the family accounts, it is not possible that there can be any fallacy in this statement, in my brother's favor. *His temperance and frugality were everything that could be wished.*" During his residence for six months in Irvine, indeed, where he wrought at the business of a flax-dresser, with the view of adopting that trade, that he might get settled in life, paid a shilling a week for his lodging, and fed on meal and water, with some wild boon-companions he occasionally lived rather free. No doubt he sometimes tasted the "Scotch drink," of which he ere long sung the praises; but even then, his inspiration was from "a well-head undefiled." He was as sober a man as his brother Gilbert himself, who says, "I do not recollect, during these seven years, to have ever seen him intoxicated, nor was he at all given to drinking." We have seen what were his virtues—for his vices, where must we look?

During all these seven years, the most dangerous in the life of every one, that of Robert Burns was singularly free from the sin to which nature is prone; nor had he drunk of that guilty cup of the intoxication of the passions, that bewilders the virtue, and changes their wisdom into foolishness, of the discreet.

est of the children of men. But drink of it at lást he did; and like other sinners seemed sometimes even to glory in his shame. But remorse puts on looks, and utters words, that being interpreted, have far other meanings; there may be recklessness without obduracy; and though the keenest anguish of self-reproach be no proof of penitence, it is a preparation for it in nature—a change of heart can be effected only by religion. How wisely he addresses his friend!

“The sacred lowe o’ weel placed love,
Luxuriously indulge it;
But never tempt th’ illicit rove
Though naething should divulge it
I wave the quantum of the sin,
The hazard o’ concealing;
*But oh! it hardens a’ within,
And petrifies the feeling!”*

It was before any such petrification of feeling had to be deplored by Robert Burns that he loved Mary Campbell, his “Highland Mary,” with as pure a passion as ever possessed young poet’s heart; nor is there so sweet and sad a passage recorded in the life of any other one of all the sons of song. Many such partings there have been between us poor beings—blind at all times, and often blindest in our bliss—but all gone to oblivion. But that hour can never die—that scene will live for ever. Immortal the two shadows standing there, holding together the Bible—a little rivulet flowing between—in which, as in consecrated water, they have dipt their hands, water not purer than, at that moment, their united hearts.

There are few of his songs more beautiful, and none more impassioned than

“Ye banks, and braes, and streams around,
The castle o’ Montgomery,
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
Your waters never drumlie!
There simmer first unfaulds her robes,
And there the langest tarry;
For there I took the last fareweel
O’ my sweet Highland Mary.”

But what are lines like these to his "Address to Mary in Heaven!" It was the anniversary of the day on which he heard of her death—that to him was the day on which she died. He did not keep it as a day of mourning—for he was happy in as good a wife as ever man had, and cheerfully went about the work of his farm. But towards the darkening "he appeared to grow very sad about something," and wandered out of doors into the barn-yard, where his Jean found him lying on some straw with his eyes fixed on a shining star "like another moon."

"Thou lingering star, with less'ning ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usher'st in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast!"

He wrote them all down just as they now are, in their immortal beauty, and gave them to his wife. Jealousy may be felt even of the dead. But such sorrow as this the more endeared her husband to her heart—a heart ever faithful—and at times when she needed to practise that hardest of all virtues in a wife—forgiving; but here all he desired was her sympathy—and he found it in some natural tears.

William Burnes was now—so writes Robert to one of his cousins—"in his own opinion, and indeed in almost everybody's else, in a dying condition,"—far gone in a consumption, as it was called; but dying, though not sixty, of old age at last. His lot in this life was in many things a hard one, but his blessings had been great, and his end was peace. All his children had been dutiful to their parents, and to their care he confided their mother. If he knew of Robert's transgressions in one year, he likewise knew of his obedience through many; nor feared that he would strive to the utmost to shelter his mother in the storm. Robert writes, "On the 13th current (Feb., 1784) I lost the best of fathers. Though to be sure, we have had long warning of the impending stroke, still the feelings of nature

claim their part; and I cannot recollect the tender endearments and parental lessons of the best of friends, and the ablest of instructors, without feeling what perhaps the calmer dictates of reason would partly condemn. I hope my father's friends in your country will not let their connection in this place die with him. For my part I shall ever with pleasure, with pride, acknowledge my connection with those who were allied, by the ties of blood and friendship, to a man whose memory I will ever honor and revere." And now the family remove to Mossgiel,

"A virtuous household but exceeding poor."

How fared Burns during the next two years, as a peasant? How fared he as a poet? As a peasant, poorly and hardly—as a poet, greatly and gloriously. How fared he as a man? *Read his confessions.* Mossgiel was the coldest of all the soils on which the family had slaved and starved—starved is too strong a word—and, in spite of its ingratitude, its fields are hallowed ground. Thousands and tens of thousands have come afar to look on them; and Wordsworth's self has "gazed himself away" on the pathetic prospect.

" 'There,' said a stripling, pointing with much pride,
Towards a low roof, with green trees half-concealed,
'Is Mossgiel farm; and that's the very field
Where Burns plough'd up the Daisy.' Far and wide
A plain below stretched seaward, while, descried
Above sea-clouds, the peaks of Arran rose;
And, by that simple notice, the repose
Of earth, sky, sea, and air, was vivified.
Beneath the random bield of clod or stone,
Myriads of daisies have shone forth in flower
Near the lark's nest, and in their natural hour
Have passed away; less happy than the one
That, by the unwilling ploughshare, died to prove
The tender charm of poetry and love."

Peasant—Poet—Man—is, indeed, an idle distinction. Burns is sitting alone in the Auld Clay-Biggin, for it has its one retired room; and as he says, "half-mad, half-fed, half-sarkit"—all he had made by rhyme! He is the picture of a desponding

I saw grim nature's visage hoar
Struck thy young eye.

"Or, when the deep green-mantl'd earth
Warm cherish'd every flow'ret's birth,
And joy and music pouring forth
In ev'ry grove,
I saw thee eye the gen'ral mirth
With boundless love.

"When ripen'd fields, and azure skies,
Call'd forth the reaper's rustling noise,
I saw thee leave their evening joys,
And lonely stalk,
To vent thy bosom's swelling rise
In pensive walk.

"When youthful love, warm-blushing strong,
Keen-shivering shot thy nerves along,
Those accents, grateful to thy tongue
Th' adored *Name*,
I taught thee how to pour in song,
To soothe thy flame.

"I saw thy pulse's maddening play,
Wild send thee pleasure's devious way,
Misled by fancy's meteor ray,
By passion driven ;
But yet the light that led astray
Was light from heaven.

* * * *

"To give my counsels all in one
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan ;
Preserve the dignity of man,
With soul erect :
And trust the Universal Plan
Will all protect.

"*And wear thou this*—she solemn said,
And bound the Holly round my head :
The polish'd leaves, and berries red,
Did rustling play ;
And, like a passing thought, she fled
In light away."

“To reconcile to our imagination the entrance of an aerial being into a mansion of this kind,” says the excellent Currie, “required the powers of Burns ; he, however, succeeds.” Burns cared not at that time for our imagination—not he, indeed—not a straw ; nor did he so much as know of our existence. He knew that there was a human race ; and he believed that he was born to be a great power among them, especially all over his beloved and beloved Scotland. “All hail ! my own inspired bard !” That “all hail !” he dared to hear from supernatural lips, but not till his spirit had long been gazing, and long been listening to one commissioned by the “genius of the land,” to stand a Vision before her chosen poet in his hut. Reconcile her entrance to our imagination ! Into no other mansion but that “Auld Clay Biggin,” would Coila have descended from the sky.

The critic continues, “To the painting on her mantle, on which is depicted the most striking scenery, as well as the most distinguished characters of his native country, some exception may be made. The mantle of Coila, like the cup of Thyrsis (see the first Idyllium of Theocritus), and the shield of Achilles, is too much crowded with figures, and some of the objects represented upon it are scarcely admissible according to the principles of design.”

We advise you not to see the first Idyllium of Theocritus. Perhaps you have no Greek. Mr. Chapman’s translation is as good as a translation can well be, but then you may not have a copy of it at hand. A pretty wooden cup it is, with curled ears and ivy-twined lips—embossed thereon the figure of a woman with flowing robes and a Lydian head-dress, to whom two angry men are making love. Hard by, a stout old fisherman on a rock is in the act of throwing his net into the sea : not far from him is a vineyard, where a boy is sitting below a hedge framing a locust trap with stalks of asphodel, and guarding the grapes from a couple of sly foxes. Thyrsis, we are told by Theocritus, bought it from a Calydonian Skipper for a big cheese-cake and a goat. We must not meddle with the shield of Achilles.

Turn we then to the “Vision” of Burns, our Scottish Theocritus, as we have heard him classically called, and judge of Dr. Currie’s sense in telling us to see the cup of Thyrsis.

“Down flow’d her robe, a tartan sheen ;
 Till half her leg was scrimply seen ;
 And such a leg ! my bonnie Jean
 Could only peer it ;
 Sae straught, sae taper, tight, and clean,
 Nane else could near it.”

You observe Burns knew not yet who stood before him—woman, or angel, or fairy—but the Vision reminded him of her whom best he loved.

“Green, slender, leaf-clad *holly-boughs*
 Were twisted gracefu’ round her brows ;
 I took her for *some Scottish Muse*,
 By that same token.”

Some Scottish Muse—but which of them he had not leisure to conjecture, so lost was he in admiration of that mystic robe—“that mantle large, of greenish hue.” As he continued to gaze on her, his imagination beheld whatever it chose to behold. The region dearest to the Poet’s heart is all emblazoned there—and there too its sages and its heroes.

“Here, rivers in the sea were lost ;
 There, mountains to the skies were tost :
 Here, tumbling billows mark’d the coast,
 With surging foam :
 There, distant shone Art’s lofty boast,
 The lordly dome.

“Here, Doon pour’d down his far-fetch’d floods ;
 There, well-fed Irvine stately thuds :
 Auld hermit Ayr staw thro’ his woods,
 On to the shore ;
 And many a lesser torrent scuds,
 With seeming roar.

“Low, in a sandy valley spread,
 An ancient borough rear’d her head ;
 Still, as in Scottish story read,
 She boasts a race,
 To ev’ry nobler virtue bred,
 And polish’d grace

and of optics in general ; but they belong to the material elements of nature ; this is a spiritual creation, and Burns is its maker. It is far from perfect, either in design or execution ; but perfection is found nowhere here below, except in Shakespeare ; and, if the Vision offend you, we fear your happiness will not be all you could desire it even in the Tempest or the Midsummer's Night's Dream.

How full of fine poetry are one and all of his Epistles to his friends Sillar, Lapraik, Simpson, Smith,—worthy men one and all, and among them much mother-wit almost as good as genius, and thought to be genius by Burns, who in the generous enthusiasm of his nature exaggerated the mental gifts of everybody he loved, and conceived their characters to be “accordant to his soul's desire.” His “Epistle to Davie” was among the very earliest of his productions, and Gilbert's favorable opinion of it suggested to him the first idea of becoming an author. “It was, I think, in summer 1784, when in the interval of hard labor, he and I were reading in the garden (kail-yard), that he repeated to me the principal parts of this Epistle.” It breathes a noble spirit of independence, and of proud contentment dallying with the hardships of its lot, and in the power of manhood regarding the riches that are out of its reach, without a particle of envy, and with a haughty scorn. True he says, “I hanker, and canker to see their cursed pride ;” but he immediately bursts out into a strain that gives the lie to his own words :

“What tho', like commoners of air,
 We wander out, we know not where,
 But either house or hall ?
 Yet nature's charms, the hills and woods,
 The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,
 Are free alike to all.
 In days when daisies deck the ground,
 And blackbirds whistle clear,
 With honest joy our hearts will bound,
 To see the coming year :
 On braes when we please, then,
 We'll sit an' sowth a tune ;
 Syne rhyme till't, wee'l time till't,
 And sing't when we hae done.

"It's no in titles nor in rank ;
 It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
 To purchase peace and rest ;
 It's no in makin' muckle mair ;
 It's no in books, it's no in lear,
 To make us truly blest ;
 If happiness hae not her seat
 And centre in the breast,
 We may be wise, or rich, or great,
 But never can be blest ;
 Nae treasures, nor pleasures,
 Could make us happy lang ;
 The heart ay's the part ay,
 That makes us right or wrang."

Through all these Epistles we hear him exulting in the consciousness of his own genius, and pouring out his anticipations in verses so full of force and fire, that of themselves they privilege him to declare himself a Poet after Scotland's own heart. Not even in "The Vision" does he kindle into brighter transports, when foreseeing his fame, and describing the fields of its glory, than in his Epistle to the schoolmaster of Ochiltree ; for all his life he associated with schoolmasters—finding along with knowledge, talent, and integrity, originality and strength of character prevalent in that meritorious and ill-rewarded class of men. What can be finer than this ?

"We'll sing auld Coila's plains an' fells,
 Her moors red-brown wi' heather bells,
 Her banks an' braes, her dens and dells,
 Where glorious Wallace
 Aft bare the gree, as story tells,
 Frae southern billies.

"At Wallace' name what Scottish blood
 But boils up in a spring-tide flood !
 Oft have our fearless fathers strode
 By Wallace' side,
 Still pressing onward, red-wat-shod,
 Or glorious dy'd.

"O, sweet are Coila's haughs an' woods,
 When lintwhites chaunt among the buds,

Whyles glittered to the nightly rays,
 Wi' bickering, dancing dazzle ;
 Whyles cookit underneath the braes,
 Below the spreading hazel,
 Unseen that night."

Such pretty passages of pure description are rare, and the charm of this one depends on its sudden sweet intrusion into the very midst of a scene of noisy merriment. But there are many passages in which the descriptive power is put forth under the influence of emotion so gentle that they come within that kind of composition in which it has been thought Burns does not excel. As for example,

" Nae mair the flower on field or meadow springs ;
 Nae mair the grove with airy concert rings,
 Except perhaps the Robin's whistling glee,
 Proud o' the height o' some bit half-lang tree ;
 The hoary morns precede the sunny days,
 Mild, calm, serene, wide spreads the noon-tide blaze,
 While thick the gossamour waves wanton in the rays."

Seldom setting himself to describe visual objects, but when he is under strong emotion, he seems to have taken considerable pains when he did, to produce something striking ; and though he never fails on such occasions to do so, yet he is sometimes ambitious overmuch, and, though never feeble, becomes bombastic, as in his lines on the Fall of Fyers :

" And viewless echo's ear astonished rends."

In the "Brigs of Ayr" there is one beautiful, and one magnificent passage of this kind.

" All before their sight,
 A fairy train appear'd in order bright :
 Adown the glittering stream they featly danc'd ;
 Bright to the moon their various dresses glanc'd :
 They footed o'er the wat'ry glass so neat,
 The infant ice scarce bent beneath their feet :
 While arts of Minstrelsy among them rung,
 And soul-ennobling Bards heroic ditties sung."

He then breaks off in celebration of "M'Lauchlan, thairm-inspiring sage," that is, "a well-known performer of Scottish music on the violin," and returns, at his leisure, to the fairies!

The other passage which we have called magnificent is a description of a spate. But in it, it is true, he personates the Auld Brig, and is inspired by wrath and contempt of the New.

"Conceited gowk! puff'd up wi' windy pride!
 This monie a year I've stood the flood an' tide;
 And tho' wi' crazy eild I'm sair forfairn,
 I'll be a Brig, when ye're as hapeless cairn!
 As yet ye little ken about the matter,
 But twa-three winters will inform you better,
 When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains,
 Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains;
 When from the hills where springs the brawling Coil,
 Or stately Lugar's mossy fountains boil,
 Or where the Greenock winds his moorland course,
 Or haunted Garpal draws his feeble source,
 Arous'd by blust'ring winds an' spotting thowes,
 In mony a torrent down his sna-broo rowes;
 While crashing ice, borne on the roaring speat,
 Sweeps dams, an' mills, an' brigs, a' to the gate;
 And from Glenbuck, down to the Ratton-key,
 Auld Ayr is just one lengthen'd, tumbling sea;
 Then down ye'll hurl, deil nor ye never rise!
 And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies."

Perhaps we have dwelt too long on this point; but the truth is that Burns would have utterly despised most of what is now dignified with the name of poetry, where harmlessly enough

"Pure description takes the place of sense;"

but far worse, where the agonizing artist intensifies himself into genuine convulsions at the shrine of nature, or acts the epileptic to extort alms. The world is beginning to lose patience with such idolators, and insists on being allowed to see the sun set with her own eyes, and with her own ears to hear the sea. Why, there is often more poetry in five lines of Burns than any fifty volumes of the versifiers who have had the audacity to criticise him—as by way of specimen—

“When biting Boreas, fell and doure,
Sharp shivers thro’ the leafless bow’r;
When Phœbus gies a short-liv’d glow’r
Far south the lift,
Dim-dark’ning thro’ the flaky show’r
Or whirling drift:

“Ae night the storm the steeples rock’d,
Poor labor sweet in sleep was lock’d,
While burns, wi’ snawy wreaths up-chock’d,
Wild-eddying swirl,
Or thro’ the mining outlet bock’d,
Down headlong hurl.”

“Halloween” is now almost an obsolete word—and the liveliest of all festivals, that used to usher in the winter with one long night of mirthful mockery of superstitious fancies, not unattended with stirrings of imaginative fears in many a simple breast, is gone with many other customs of the good old time, not among town-folks only, but dwellers in rural parishes far withdrawn from the hum of crowds, where all such rites originate and latest fall into desuetude. The present wise generation of youngsters can care little or nothing about a poem which used to drive their grandfathers and grandmothers half-mad with merriment when boys and girls, gathered in a circle round some choice reciter, who, though perhaps endowed with no great memory for grammar, had half of Burns by heart. Many of them, doubtless, are of opinion that it is a silly affair. So must think the more aged march-of-mind men who have outgrown the whims and follies of their ill-educated youth, and become instructors in all manner of wisdom. In practice extinct to elderly people it survives in poetry; and there the body of the harmless superstition, in its very form and pressure, is embalmed. “Halloween” was thought, surely you all know *that*, to be a night “when witches, devils, and other mischief-making beings, are all abroad on their baneful midnight errands; particularly those aerial people, the fairies, are said on that night to hold a grand anniversary.” So writes Burns in a note; but in the poem evil spirits are disarmed of all their terrors, and fear is fun. It might have begun well enough, and nobody would have found fault, with

“Some merry, friendly, kintra folks,
 Together did convene,
 To burn their nits, an’ pou their stocks,
 An’ haud their Halloween
 Fu’ blythe this night;”

but Burns, by a few beautiful introductory lines, brings the festival at once within the world of poetry.

“Upon that night, when fairies light,
 On Cassilis Downnans dance,
 Or owre the lays, in splendid blaze,
 On sprightly coursers prance;
 Or for Colean the route is ta’en,
 Beneath the moon’s pale beams;
 There, up the cove, to stray an’ rove
 Among the rocks and streams
 To sport that night.

“Among the bonnie winding banks,
 Where Doon rins, wimpling clear,
 Where Bruce ance rul’d the martial ranks
 And shook his Carrick spear.”

Then instantly he collects the company—the business of the evening is set a-going—each stanza has its new actor and its new charm—the transitions are as quick as it is in the power of winged words to fly; female characters of all ages and dispositions, from the auld guid-wife “wha fuft her pipe wi’ sic a lunt,” to wee Jenny “wi’ her little skelpie limmer’s face”—Jean, Nell, Merran, Meg, maidens all—and “wanton widow Leezie”—figure each in her own individuality animated into full life, by a few touches. Nor less various the males, from hav’rel Will to “auld uncle John wha wedlock’s joys sin’ Mar’s year did desire”—Rab and Jock, and “fechtin Jamie Fleck” like all bullies “cooard afore bogles;” the only pause in their fast-following proceedings being caused by garrulous grannie’s pious reproof of Jenny for daurin to try sic sportin “as eat the apple at the glass”—a reproof proving that her own wrinkled breast holds many queer memories of lang-syne Halloweens;—all the carking cares of the work-day world are clean forgotten; the hopes, fears and wishes that most agitate every human breast,

and are by the simplest concealed, here exhibit themselves without disguise in the freedom not only permitted but inspired by the passion that rules the night—"the passion," says the poet himself, "of prying into futurity, which makes a striking part of the history of human nature in its rude state, in all ages and nations; and it may be some entertainment to a philosophic mind, if any such should honor the author with a perusal, to see the remains of it, among the more unenlightened of our own."

But how have we been able to refrain from saying a few words about the Cottar's Saturday Night? How affecting Gilbert's account of its origin!

"Robert had frequently remarked to me that he thought there was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase, 'Let us worship God,' used by a decent sober head of a family introducing family worship. To this sentiment of the author the world is indebted for the Cottar's Saturday Night. The hint of the plan, and title of the poem, were taken from Ferguson's *Farmer's Ingle*. When Robert had not some pleasure in view in which I was not thought fit to participate, we used frequently to walk together, when the weather was favorable, on the Sunday afternoons (those precious breathing-times to the laboring part of the community) and enjoyed such Sundays as would make me regret to see their number abridged. It was on one of those walks that I first had the pleasure of hearing the author repeat *the Cottar's Saturday Night*. I do not recollect to have read or heard anything by which I was more *highly electrified*." No wonder Gilbert was highly electrified; for though he had read or heard many things of his brother Robert's of equal poetical power, not one among them all was so charged with those sacred influences that connect the human heart with heaven. It must have sounded like a very revelation of all the holiness for ever abiding in that familiar observance, but which custom, without impairing its efficacy, must often partially hide from the children of labor when it is all the time helping to sustain them upon and above this earth. And this from the erring to the steadfast brother! From the troubled to the quiet spirit! out of a heart too often steeped in the waters of bitterness, issuing, as from an unpolluted fountain, the inspiration of pious

song ! But its effects on innumerable hearts is not now *electrical*—it inspires peace. It is felt yet, and sadly changed will then be Scotland, if ever it be not felt, by every one who peruses it, to be a communication from brother to brother. It is felt by us, all through from beginning to end, to be BURNS's *Cottar's Saturday Night* ; at each succeeding sweet or solemn stanza we more and more love the man—at its close we bless him as a benefactor ; and if, as the picture fades, thoughts of sin and of sorrow will arise, and will not be put down, let them, as we hope for mercy, be of our own—not his ; let us tremble for ourselves as we hear a voice saying, “ Fear God and keep his commandments.”

There are few more *perfect* poems. It is the utterance of a heart whose chords were all tuned to gratitude, “ making sweet melody ” to the Giver, on a night not less sacred in His eye than His own appointed Sabbath.

“ November chill blows loud wi' angry sigh ;
 The short'ning winter day is near a close ;
 The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh ;
 The black'ning trains o' craws to their repose ;
 The toil worn *Cottar* frae his labor goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
 Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
 Hoping the *morn* in ease and rest to spend,
 And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.”

That one single stanza is in itself a picture, one may say a poem, of the poor man's life. It is so imagined on the eye that we absolutely see it ; but then not an epithet but shows the condition on which he holds, and the heart with which he endures, and enjoys it. Work he must in the face of November ; but God who made the year shortens and lengthens its days for the sake of his living creatures, and has appointed for them all their hour of rest. The “ miry beasts ” will soon be at supper in their clean-strawed stalls—“ the black'ning train o' craws ” invisibly hushed on their rocking trees ; and he whom God made after his own image, that “ toil-worn Cottar,” he too may lie down and sleep. There is nothing especial in his lot wherefore he should be pitied, nor are we asked to pity him, as he “ col-

lects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes :” many of us, who have work to do and do it not, may envy his contentment, and the religion that gladdens his release—“hoping the MORN in ease and rest to spend,” only to such as he, in truth, a Sabbath. “Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days shalt thou labor and do all that thou hast to do. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work !” O ! that man should ever find it in his heart to see in that law a stern obligation—not a merciful boon and a blessed privilege !

In those times family worship in such dwellings, all over Scotland, was not confined to one week-day. It is to be believed that William Burnes might have been heard by his son Robert duly every night saying, “Let us worship God.” “There was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase” every time he heard it ; but on “Saturday night” family worship was surrounded, in its solemnity, with a gathering of whatever is most cheerful and unalloyed in the lot of labor ; and the poet’s genius in a happy hour hearing those words in his heart, collected many nights into one, and made the whole observance, as it were, a religious establishment, it is to be hoped, for ever.

“The fifth and sixth stanzas, and the eighteenth,” says Gilbert, “thrilled with peculiar ecstasy through my soul ;” and well they might ; for, in homeliest words, they tell at once of home’s familiar doings and of the highest thoughts that can ascend in supplication to the throne of God. What is the eighteenth stanza, and why did it too “thrill with peculiar ecstasy my soul ?” You may be sure that whatever thrilled Gilbert’s soul will thrill yours if it be in holy keeping ; for he was a good man, and walked all his days fearing God.

“Then homeward all take off their sev’ral way ;
 The youngling cottagers retire to rest ;
 The parent-pair their secret homage pay,
 And proffer up to Heaven the warm request
 That He who stills the raven’s clam’rous nest,
 And decks the lily fair in flow’ry pride,
 Would, in the way his wisdom sees the best,
 For them and for their little ones provide :
 But chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine preside.”

Think again of the first stanza of all—for you have forgotten it—of the toil-worn Cottar collecting his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes, and weary o'er the moor bending his course homewards. In spite of his hope of *the morn*, you could hardly help looking on him *then* as if he were disconsolate—*now* you are prepared to believe, with the poet, that such brethren are among the best of their country's sons, that

“From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad;”

and you desire to join in the Invocation that bursts from his pious and patriotic heart :

“O *Scotia* ! my dear, my native soil !
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent !
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil,
Be bless'd with health, and peace, and sweet content !
And O ! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile !
Then, howe'er *crowns* and *coronets* be rent,
A *virtuous populace* may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much lov'd *Isle*.

“O Thou ! who pour'd the patriotic tide
That stream'd through Wallace's undaunted heart ;
Who dared to nobly stem tyrannic pride,
Or nobly die, the second glorious part,
(The patriot's God, peculiarly thou art,
His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward !)
O never, never, Scotia's realm desert :
But still the patriot, and the patriot bard,
In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard !”

We said there are few more perfect poems. The expression is hardly a correct one ; but in two of the stanzas there are lines which we never read without wishing them away, and there is one stanza we could sometimes almost wish away altogether ; the sentiment, though beautifully worded, being somewhat harsh, and such as must be felt to be unjust by many devout and pious people :

"They chant their artless notes in simple guise ;
 They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim :
 Perhaps Dundee's wild warbling measures rise,
 Or plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name ;
 Or noble Elgin beats the heaven-ward flame,
 The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays :
Compared with these Italian trills are tame ;
The tickl'd ears no heart-felt raptures raise ;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise."

We do not find fault with Burns for having written these lines : for association of feeling with feeling, by contrast, is perhaps most of all powerful in music. Believing that there was no devotional spirit in Italian music, it was natural for him to denounce its employment in religious services ; but we all know that it cannot without most ignorant violation of truth be said of the hymns of that most musical of all people, and superstitious as they may be, among the most devout, that

"Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise."

Our objection to some lines in another stanza is more serious, for it applies not to a feeling but a judgment. That there is more virtue in a cottage than in a palace we are not disposed to deny at any time, least of all when reading the Cottar's Saturday Night : and we entirely go along with Burns when he says,

"And certes, in fair virtue's heavenly road,
 The cottage leaves the palace far behind ;"

but there, we think, he ought to have stopped, or illustrated the truth in a milder manner than

"What is a lordling's pomp ? a cumbrous load,
 Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
 Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refined."

Our moral nature revolts with a sense of injustice from the comparison of the wickedness of one class with the goodness of another ; and the effect is the very opposite of that intended, the rising up of a miserable conviction that for a while had been

laid asleep, that vice and crime are not excluded from cots, but often, alas! are found there in their darkest colors and most portentous forms.

The whole stanza we had in our mind as somehow or other not entirely delightful, is

“ Compared with this, how poor Religion’s pride,
 In all the pomp of method, and of art,
 When men display to congregations wide,
 Devotion’s every grace except the heart.
 The Pow’r, incens’d, the pageant will desert,
 The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole ;
 But haply, in some cottage far apart,
 May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul ;
 And in his book of life the inmates poor enrol.”

“ Let us join in the worship of God ” is a strong desire of nature, and a commanded duty ; and thus are brought together, for praise and prayer, “ congregations wide,” in all populous places of every Christian land. Superstition is sustained by the same sympathy as religion—enlightenment of reason being essential to faith. There sit, every Sabbath, hundreds of hypocrites, thousands of the sincere, tens of thousands of the indifferent—how many of the devout or how few who shall say that understands the meaning of *devotion* ? If *all* be false and hollow, a mere semblance only, then indeed

“ The Pow’r incens’d, the pageant will desert,
 The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole ; ”

but if, even in the midst of “ religion’s pride,” there be humble and contrite hearts—if a place be found for the poor in spirit even “ in gay religions full of pomp and gold ”—a Christian poet ought to guard his heart against scorn of the ritual of any form of Christian worship. Be it performed in Cathedral, Kirk, or Cottage—God regards it only when performed in spirit and in truth.

Remember all this poetry, and a hundred almost as fine things besides, was composed within little more than two years, by a man all the while working for wages—seven pounds from May-day to May-day ; and that he never idled at his work, but mowed

and ploughed as if working by the piece, and could afford therefore, God bless his heart, to stay the share for a minute, but too late for the “wee, sleekit, cowrin, timorous beastie’s” nest. Folks have said he was a bad farmer, and neglected Mossiel, an idler in the land.

“How various his employments whom the world
Calls idle !”

Absent in the body, we doubt not, he frequently was from his fields ; oftenest in the evenings and at night. Was he in Nance Tinnock’s ? She knew him by name and head-mark, for once seen he was not to be forgotten ; but she complained that he had never drunk three half-mutchkins in her house, whatever he might say in his lying poems. In Poussie Nannie’s—mother of Racer Jess ?—He was there *once* ; and out of the scum and refuse of the outcasts of the lowest grade of possible being, he constructed a Beggar’s Opera, in which the singers and dancers, drabs and drunkards all, belong still to humanity ; and though huddling together in the filth of the flesh, must not be classed, in their enjoyments, with the beasts that perish. In the Smiddy ? Ay, you might have found him there, at times when he had no horse to be shoed, no coulter to be sharpened.

“When Vulcan gies his bellows breath,
An’ ploughmen gather wi’ their graith,
O rare ! to see thee fizz an’ freath
I’ th’ luggit caup !
Then *Burnewin* comes on like death
At every chaup.

“Nae mercy, then, for airn or steel ;
The brawnie, bainie, ploughman cheel,
Brings hand owrehip, wi’ sturdy wheel,
The strong forehammer,
Till block an’ studdie ring an’ reel
Wi’ dinsome clamor.”

On frozen Muir-loch ? Among the curlers “a’ their *roaring* play”—roaring is the right word—but ’tis not the bonspiel only that roars, it is the ice, and echo tells it is from her crags that submit not to the snow. There king of his rink was Rabbie

Burns to be found; and at night in the Hostelry, in the reek of beef and greens and "Scotch drink," Apollo in the shape of a ploughman at the head of the fir-table that dances with all its glasses to the horny fists clenching with cordial thumpers the sallies of wit and humor volleying from his lips and eyes, unreprieved by the hale old minister who is happy to meet his parishioners out of the pulpit, and by his presence keeps the poet within bounds, if not of absolute decorum, of that decency becoming men in their most jovial mirth, and not to be violated without reproach by genius in its most wanton mood dallying even with forbidden things. Or at a Rockin'? An evening meeting, as you know, "*one* of the objects of which," so says the glossary, "is spinning with the rock or distaff;" but which has many other objects, as the dullest may conjecture, when lads and lasses have come flocking from "behind the hills where Stinchar flows, mang muirs and mosses many o'," to one solitary homestead made roomy enough for them all; and if now and then felt to be too close and crowded for the elderly people and the old, not unprovided with secret spots near at hand in the broom and the brackens, where the sleeping lintwhites sit undisturbed by lovers' whispers, and lovers may look, if they choose it, unashamed to the stars.

And what was he going to do with all this poetry—poetry accumulating fast as his hand, released at night from other implements, could put it on paper, in bold, round, upright characters, that tell of fingers more familiar with the plough than the pen? He himself sometimes must have wondered to find every receptacle in the spence crammed with manuscripts, to say nothing of the many others floating about all over the country, and setting the smiddies in a roar, and not a few, of which nothing was said, folded in the breast-kerchiefs of maidens, put therein by his own hand on the lea-rig, beneath the milk-white thorn. What brought him out into the face of day as a Poet?

Of all the women Burns ever loved, Mary Campbell not excepted, the dearest to him by far, from first to last, was Jean Armour. During composition her image rises up from his heart before his eyes the instant he touches on any thought or feeling with which she could be in any way connected; and sometimes

his allusions to her might even seem out of place, did they not please us, by letting us know that he could not altogether forget her, whatever the subject his muse had chosen. Others may have inspired more poetical strains, but there is an earnestness in his fervors, at her name, that brings her breathing in warm flesh and blood to his breast. Highland Mary he would have made his wife, and perhaps broken her heart. He loved her living, as a creature in a dream, dead as a spirit in heaven. But Jean Armour possessed his heart in the stormiest season of his passions, and she possessed it in the lull that preceded their dissolution. She was well worthy of his affection, on account of her excellent qualities; and though never beautiful, had many personal attractions. But Burns felt himself bound to her by that inscrutable mystery in the soul of every man, by which one other being, and one only, is believed, and truly, to be essential to his happiness here,—without whom, life is not life. Her strict and stern father, enraged out of all religion, both natural and revealed, with his daughter for having sinned with a man of sin, tore from her hands her *marriage lines* as she besought forgiveness on her knees, and without pity for the life stirring within her, terrified her into the surrender and renunciation of the title of wife, branding her thereby with an abhorred name. A father's power is sometimes very terrible, and it was so here; for she submitted, with less outward show of agony than can be well understood, and Burns almost became a madman. His worldly circumstances were wholly desperate, for bad seasons had stricken dead the cold soil of Mossiel; but he was willing to work for his wife in ditches, or to support her for a while at home, by his wages as a negro-driver in the West Indies.

A more unintelligible passage than this never occurred in the life of any other man, certainly never a more trying one; and Burns must at this time have been tormented by as many violent passions, in instant succession or altogether, as the human heart could hold. In verse he had for years given vent to all his moods; and his brother tells us that the LAMENT was composed "after the first distraction of his feelings had a little subsided." Had he lost her by death he would have been dumb, but his

grief was not mortal, and it grew eloquent, when relieved and sustained from prostration by other passions that lift up the head, if it be only to let it sink down again, rage, pride, indignation, jealousy, and scorn. "Never man loved, or rather adored woman more than I did her; and to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all. My poor dear unfortunate Jean! It is not the losing her that makes me so unhappy; but for her sake I feel most severely; I grieve she is in the road to, I fear, eternal ruin. May Almighty God forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may his grace be with her, and bless her in all her future life! I can have no nearer idea of the place of eternal punishment than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. I have tried often to forget her; I have run into all kinds of dissipation and riot, mason-meetings, drinking matches, and other mischiefs, to drive her out of my head, but all in vain. And now for the grand cure: the ship is on her way home, that is to take me out to Jamaica; and then farewell, dear old Scotland! and farewell, dear ungrateful Jean! for never, never will I see you ^{more}." In the LAMENT, there are the same passions, but genius has ennobled them by the tenderness and elevation of the finest poetry, guided their transitions by her solemnizing power, inspired their appeals to conscious night and nature, and subdued down to the beautiful and pathetic, the expression of what had else been agony and despair.

Twenty pounds would enable him to leave Scotland, and take him to Jamaica; and to raise them, it occurred to Robert Burns to publish his poems by subscription! "I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I got subscriptions for about three hundred and sixty. My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides, I pocketed, all expenses deducted, near twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenturing myself for want of money to procure my passage. As

soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail for the Clyde, 'For hungry ruin had me in the wind.'" The ship sailed ; but Burns was still at Mossgiel, for his strong heart could not tear itself away from Scotland, and some of his friends encouraged him to hope that he might be made a gauger ! In a few months he was about to be hailed, by the universal acclamation of his country, a great National Poet.

But the enjoyment of his fame all round his birth-place, "the heart and the main region of his song," intense as we know it was, though it assuaged, could not still the troubles of his heart ; his life amidst it all was as hopeless as when it was obscure ; "his chest was on its road to Greenock, where he was to embark in a few days for America," and again he sung

"Farewell old Coila's hills and dales,
Her heathy moors and winding vales,
The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
Pursuing past unhappy loves.
Farewell my friends, farewell my foes,
My peace with these, my love with those—
The bursting tears my heart declare,
Farewell the bonny banks of Ayr ;"

when a few words from a blind old man to a country clergyman kindled within him a new hope, and set his heart on fire ; and while

"November winds blew loud wi' angry sugh,"

"I posted away to Edinburgh without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence on my zenith, for once made a revolution to the Nadir."

At first, Burns was stared at with such eyes as people open wide who behold a prodigy ; for though he looked the rustic, and his broad shoulders had the stoop that stalwart men acquire at the plough, his swarthy face was ever and anon illumined with the look that genius alone puts off and on, and that

comes and goes with a new interpretation of imagination' winged words. For a week or two he had lived chiefly with some Ayrshire acquaintances, and was not personally known to any of the leading men. But as soon as he came forward, and was seen and heard, his name went through the city, and people asked one another, "Have you met Burns?" His demeanor among the Magnates, was not only unembarrassed but dignified, and it was at once discerned by the blindest that he belonged to the aristocracy of nature. "The idea which his conversation conveyed of the power of his mind, exceeded, if possible, that which is suggested by his writings. Among the poets whom I have happened to know, I have been struck, in more than one instance, with the unaccountable disparity between their general talents, and the occasional aspirations of their more favored moments. But all the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his predilections for poetry were rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition." Who those poets were, of occasional inspiration and low general talents, and in conversation felt to be of the race of the feeble, Dugald Stewart had too much delicacy to tell us; but if Edinburgh had been their haunt, and theirs the model of the poetical character in the judgment of her sages, no wonder that a new light was thrown on the Philosophy of the Human Mind by that of Robert Burns. For his intellectual faculties were of the highest order, and though deferential to superior knowledge, he spoke on all subjects he understood, and they were many, with a voice of determination, and when need was, of command. It was not in the debating club in Tarbolton alone, about which so much nonsense has been prosed, that he had learned eloquence; he had been long giving chosen and deliberate utterance to all his bright ideas and strong emotions; they were all his own, or he had made them his own by transfusion; and so, therefore, was his speech. Its fount was in genius, and therefore could not run dry—a flowing spring that needed neither to be *fanged* nor pumped. As he had the power of eloquence, so had he the will, the desire, the ambition to put it forth; for he rejoiced to carry

with him the sympathies of his kind, and in his highest moods he was not satisfied with their admiration without their love. There never beat a heart more alive to kindness. To the wise and good, how eloquent his gratitude! to Glencairn, how imperishable! This exceeding tenderness of heart often gave such pathos to his ordinary talk, that he even melted common-place people into tears! Without scholarship, without science, with not much of what is called information, he charmed the first men in a society equal in all these to any at that time in Europe. The scholar was happy to forget his classic lore, as he listened, for the first time, to the noblest sentiments flowing from the lips of a rustic, sometimes in his own Doric, divested of all offensive vulgarity, but oftener in language which, in our northern capital, was thought pure English, and comparatively it was so, for in those days the speech of many of the most distinguished persons would have been unintelligible out of Scotland, and they were proud of excelling in the use of their mother tongue. The philosopher wondered that the peasant should comprehend intuitively truths that had been established, it was so thought, by reasoning demonstrative or inductive; as the illustrious Stewart, a year or two afterwards, wondered how clear an idea Burns the Poet had of Alison's True Theory of Taste. True it is that the great law of association has by no one been so beautifully stated in a single sentence as by Burns: "That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime than the twingle-twangle of a Jews'-harp; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stalk of the burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all associations of ideas—these I had set down as irrefragable orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith." The man of wit—aye even Harry Erskine himself—and a wittier than he never charmed social life—was nothing loth, with his delightful amenity, to cease for a while the endless series of anecdotes so admirably illustrative of the peculiarities of nations, orders, or individuals, and almost all of them created or vivified by his own genius, that the most accomplished compa-

nies might experience a new pleasure from the rich and racy humor of a natural converser fresh from the plough.

And how did Burns bear all this, and much besides even more trying? For you know that a duchess declared that she had never before in all her life met with a man who so fairly carried her off her feet. Hear Professor Stewart: "The attentions he received during his stay in town, from all ranks and descriptions of persons, were such as would have turned any head but his own. I cannot say that I could perceive any unfavorable effect which they left on his mind. He retained the same simplicity of manners and appearance which had struck me so forcibly when I first saw him in the country; nor did he seem to feel any additional self-importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance." In many passages of his letters to friends who had their fears, Burns expressed entire confidence in his own self-respect, and in terms the most true and touching; as, for example, to Dr. Moore: "The hope to be admired for ages is, in by far the greater part of those who even were authors of *répute*, an unsubstantial dream. For my part, my first ambition was, and still is, to please my compeers, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood." And to his venerated friend Mrs. Dunlop, he gives utterance, in the midst of his triumphs, to dark forebodings, some of which were but too soon fulfilled! "You are afraid that I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet. Alas! Madam, I know myself and the world too well. I assure you, Madam, I do not dissemble, when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice, which has borne me to a height where I am feeling absolutely certain my abilities are inadequate to support me; and too surely do I see that time, when the same tide will leave me, and recede, perhaps, as far below the mark of truth. I do not say this in ridiculous affectation of self-abasement and modesty. I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy; and however a friend or the world may differ from me in that par-

ticular, I stand for my own opinion in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. I mention this to you once for all, to disburthen my mind, and I do not wish to hear or say more about it. But,

‘ When proud fortune’s ebbing tide recedes,’

you will bear me witness, that, when my bubble of fame was at the highest, I stood, unintoxicated with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward with rueful resolve to the hastening time when the blow of Calumny should dash it to the ground with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph.”

Such equanimity is magnanimous ; for though it is easy to declaim on the vanity of fame, and the weakness of them who are intoxicated with its bubbles, the noblest have still longed for it, and what a fatal change it has indeed often wrought on the simplicity and sincerity of the most gifted spirits ! There must be a moral grandeur in his character who receives sedately the unexpected, though deserved ratification of his title to that genius whose empire is the inner being of his race, from the voice of his native land uttered aloud through all her regions, and harmoniously combined of innumerable tones all expressive of a great people’s pride. Make what deductions you will from the worth of that “ All hail ! ” and still it must have sounded in Burns’s ears as a realization of that voice heard by his prophetic soul in the “ VISION.”

“ ALL HAIL ! MY OWN INSPIRED BARD !

I taught thy manners-painting strains,

The loves, the ways of simple swains,

TILL NOW, O’ER ALL MY WIDE DOMAINS

THY FAME EXTENDS ! ”

Robert Burns was not the man to have degraded himself everlastingly, by one moment’s seeming slight or neglect of friends, new or old, belonging either to his own condition, or to a rank in life somewhat higher perhaps than his own, although not exactly to that “ select society ” to which the wonder awakened by his genius had given him a sudden introduction. Persons in that middle or inferior rank were his natural, his best, and his

truest friends ; and many of them, there can be no doubt, were worthy of his happiest companionship either in the festal hour or the hour of closer communion. He had no right, with all his genius, to stand aloof from them, and with a heart like his he had no inclination. Why should he have lived exclusively with lords and ladies—paper or land lords—ladies by descent or courtesy—with aristocratic advocates, philosophical professors, clergymen, wild or moderate, Arminian or Calvinistic ? Some of them were among the first men of their age ; others were doubtless not inerudite, and a few not unwitty in their own esteem ; and Burns greatly enjoyed their society, in which he met with an admiration that must have been to him the pleasure of a perpetual triumph. But more of them were dull and pompous ; incapable of rightly estimating or feeling the power of his genius ; and when the glitter and the gloss of novelty was worn off before their shallow eyes, from the poet who bore them all down into insignificance, then no doubt they began to get offended and shocked with his rusticity or rudeness, and sought refuge in the distinctions of rank, and the laws, not to be violated with impunity, of “select society.” The patronage he received was honorable, and he felt it to be so ; but it was still patronage ; and had he, for the sake of it or its givers, forgotten for a day the humblest, lowest, meanest of his friends, or even his acquaintances, how could he have borne to read his own two bold lines—

“The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man’s the gowd for a’ that ?”

Besides, we know from Burns’s poetry what was then the character of the people of Scotland, for they were its materials, its staple. Her peasantry were a noble race, and their virtues moralized his song. The inhabitants of the towns were of the same family—the same blood—one kindred—and many, most of them, had been born, or in some measure bred, in the country. Their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting were much alike ; and the shopkeepers of Edinburgh and Glasgow were as proud of Robert Burns, as the ploughmen and shepherds of Kyle and the Stewartry. He saw in them friends and brothers.

Their admiration of him was, perhaps, fully more sincere and heartfelt, nor accompanied with less understanding of his merits, than that of persons in higher places ; and most assuredly among the respectable citizens of Edinburgh Burns found more lasting friends than he ever did among her gentry and noblesse. Nor can we doubt, that then as now, there were in that order great numbers of men of well cultivated minds, whom Burns, in his best hours, did right to honor, and who were perfectly entitled to seek his society, and to open their hospitable doors to the brilliant stranger. That Burns, whose sympathies were keen and wide, and who never dreamt of looking down on others as beneath him, merely because he was conscious of his own vast superiority to the common run of men, should have shunned or been shy of such society, would have been something altogether unnatural and incredible ; nor is it at all wonderful or blameable that he should occasionally even have much preferred such society to that which has been called " more select," and therefore above his natural and proper condition. Admirably as he in general behaved in the higher circles, in those humbler ones alone could he have felt himself completely at home. His demeanor among the rich, the great, the learned, or the wise, must often have been subject to some little restraint, and all restraint of that sort is ever painful ; or, what is worse still, his talk must sometimes have partaken of display. With companions and friends, who claimed no superiority in anything, the sensitive mind of Burns must have been at its best and happiest, because completely at its ease, and free movement given to the play of all its feelings and faculties ; and in such companies we cannot but believe that his wonderful conversational powers shone forth in their most various splendor. He must have given vent there to a thousand familiar fancies, in all their freedom and all their force, which, in the fastidious society of high life, his imagination must have been too much fettered even to conceive ; and which, had they flowed from his lips, would either not have been understood, or would have given offence to that delicacy of breeding which is often hurt even by the best manners of those whose manners are all of nature's teaching, and unsubjected to the salutary restraints of artificial life. Indeed, we know

that Burns sometimes burst suddenly and alarmingly the restraints of "select society;" and that on one occasion he called a clergyman an idiot for misquoting Gray's *Elegy*—a truth that ought not to have been promulgated in presence of the parson, especially at so early a meal as breakfast: and he confesses in his most confidential letters, though indeed he was then writing with some bitterness, that he never had been truly and entirely happy at rich men's feasts. If so, then never could he have displayed there his genius in full power and lustre. His noble rage must in some measure have been repressed—the genial current of his soul in some degree frozen. He never was, never could be, the free, fearless, irresistible Robert Burns that nature made him—no, not even although he carried the Duchess of Gordon off her feet, and silenced two Ex-Moderators of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Burns, before his visit to Edinburgh, had at all times and places been in the habit of associating with the best men of his order—the best in everything, in station, in manners, in moral and intellectual character. Such men as William Tell and Hofer, for example, associated with in Switzerland and the Tyrol. Even the persons he got unfortunately too well acquainted with (but whose company he soon shook off), at Irvine and Kirk-Oswald—smugglers and their adherents, were, though a lawless and dangerous set, men of spunk, and spirit, and power, both of mind and body; nor was there anything the least degrading in an ardent, impassioned, and imaginative youth becoming for a time rather too much attached to such daring, and adventurous, and even interesting characters. They had all a fine strong poetical smell of the sea, mingled to precisely the proper pitch with that of the contraband. As a poet Burns must have been much the better of such temporary associates; as a man, let us hope, notwithstanding Gilbert's fears, not greatly the worse. The passions that boiled in his blood would have overflowed his life, often to disturb, and finally to help to destroy him, had there never been an Irvine and its sea-port. But Burns's friends, up to the time he visited Edinburgh, had been chiefly his admirable brother, a few of the ministers round about, farmers, ploughmen, farm-servants, and workers in the

winds of heaven blowing over moors and mosses, cornfields and meadows beautiful as the blue skies themselves ; and if you call that low company, you had better fling your copy of Burns, Cottar's Saturday Night, Mary in Heaven, and all, into the fire. He, the noblest peasant that ever trod the greensward of Scotland, kept the society of other peasants, whose nature was like his own ; and then, were the silken-snooded maidens whom he wooed on lea-rig and 'mang the rigs o' barley, were they who inspired at once his love and his genius, his passion and his poetry, till the whole land of Coila overflowed with his immortal song,—so that now to the proud native's ear every stream murmurs a music not its own, given it by sweet Robin's lays, and the lark more lyrical than ever seems singing his songs at the gates of heaven for the shepherd's sake, as through his half-closed hand he eyes the musical mote in the sunshine, and remembers him who “sung her new-wakened by the daisy's side,”—were they, the blooming daughters of Scotia, we demand of you on peril of your life, low company and unworthy of Robert Burns ?

As to the charge of liking to be what is vulgarly called “cock of the company,” what does that mean when brought against such a man ? In what company, pray, could not Burns, had he chosen it, and he often did choose it, have easily been the first ? No need had he to crow among dunghills. If you liken him to a bird at all, let it be the eagle, or the nightingale, or the bird of Paradise. James Montgomery has done this in some exquisite verses, which are clear in our heart, but indistinct in our memory, and therefore we cannot adorn our pages with their beauty. The truth is, that Burns, though when his heart burned within him, one of the most eloquent of men that ever set the table in a roar or a hush, was always a modest, oftèn a silent man, and he would sit for hours together, even in company, with his broad forehead on his hand, and his large lamping eyes sobered and tamed, in profound and melancholy thought. Then his soul would “spring upwards like a pyramid of fire,” and send “illumination into dark deep holds,” or brighten the brightest hour in which Feeling and Fancy ever flung their united radiance over the common ongoings of this our common-

place world and every-day life. Was this the man to desire, with low longings and base aspirations, to shine among the obscure, or rear his haughty front and giant stature among pigmies? He who

“walked in glory and in joy,
Following his plough upon the mountain-side;”

he who sat in glory and in joy at the festal board, when mirth and wine did most abound, and strangers were strangers no more within the fascination of his genius, for

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin;”

at the frugal board, surrounded by his wife and children, and servants, lord and master of his own happy and industrious home—the frugal meal, preceded and followed by thanksgiving to the Power that spread his table in the barren places?

Show us any series of works in prose or verse, in which man's being is so illustrated as to lay it bare and open for the benefit of man, and the chief pictures they contain, drawn from “select society.” There are none such; and for this reason, that in such society there is neither power to paint them, nor materials to be painted, nor colors to lay on, till the canvas shall speak a language which all the world as it runs may read. What would Scott have been, had he not loved and known the people? What would his works have been, had they not shown the many-colored character of the people? What would Shakespeare have been, had he not often turned majestically from kings, and “lords and dukes and mighty earls,” to their subjects and vassals and lowly bondsmen, and “counted the beatings of lonely hearts” in the obscure but impassioned life that stirs every nook of this earth where human beings abide? What would Wordsworth have been, had he disdained, with his high intellect and imagination, “to stoop his anointed head” beneath the wooden lintel of the poor man's door? His *Lyrical Ballads*, “with all the innocent brightness of the new-born day,” had never charmed the meditative heart. His “*Church-Yard among the Mountains*” had never taught men how to live and how to die.

These are men who have descended from aerial heights into the humblest dwellings; who have shown the angel's wing equally when poised near the earth, and floating over its cottaged vales, as when seen sailing on high through the clouds and azure depth of heaven, or hanging over the towers and temples of great cities. They shunned not to parley with the blind beggar by the way-side; they knew how to transmute, by divinest alchemy, the base metal into the fine gold. Whatever company of human beings they have mingled with, they lend it colors, and did not receive its shades; and hence their mastery over the "wide soul of the world dreaming of things to come." Burns was born, bred, lived, and died in that condition of this mortal life to which they paid but visits; his heart lay wholly there; and that heart, filled as it was with all the best human feelings, and sometimes with thoughts divine, had no fears about entering into places which timid moralists might have thought forbidden and unhallowed ground, but which he, wiser far, knew to be inhabited by creatures of conscience, bound there often in thick darkness by the inscrutable decrees of God.

For a year and more after the publication of the Edinburgh Edition, Burns led a somewhat roving life, till his final settlement with Creech. He had a right to enjoy himself; and it does not appear that there was much to blame in his conduct either in town or country, though he did not live upon air nor yet upon water. There was much dissipation in those days—much hard drinking—in select as well as in general society, in the best as well as in the worst; and he had his share of it in many circles—but never in the lowest. His associates were all honorable men, then, and in after life; and he left the Capital in possession of the respect of its most illustrious citizens. Of his various tours and excursions there is little to be said; the birth-places of old Scottish Songs he visited in the spirit of a religious pilgrim; and his poetical fervor was kindled by the grandeur of the Highlands. He had said to Mrs. Dunlop, "I have no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagued with the routine of business, for which, heaven knows! I am unfit enough, to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles, to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers, and

to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the honored abodes of her heroes. But these are all Utopian thoughts; I have dallied long enough with life; 't is time to be in earnest. I have a fond, and aged mother to care for, and some other bosom ties perhaps equally tender. Where the individual only suffers by the consequences of his own thoughtlessness, indolence, or folly, he may be excusable, nay, shining abilities, and some of the nobler virtues, may half sanctify a heedless character: but where God and nature have intrusted the welfare of others to his care, where the trust is sacred, and the ties are dear, that man must be far gone in selfishness, or strangely lost to reflection, whom these connections will not rouse to exertion."

Burns has now got liberated, for ever, from "stately Edinburgh throned on crags," the favored abode of philosophy and fashion, law and literature, reason and refinement, and has returned again into his own natural condition, neither essentially the better nor the worse of his city life; the same man he was when "the poetic genius of his country found him at the plough and threw her inspiring mantle over him." And what was he now to do with himself? Into what occupation for the rest of his days was he to settle down? It would puzzle the most sagacious even now, fifty years after the event, to say what he ought to have done that he did not do at that juncture, on which for weal or wo the future must have been so deeply felt by him to depend. And perhaps it might not have occurred to every one of the many prudent persons who have lamented over his follies, had he stood in Burns's shoes, to make over, unconditionally, to his brother one half of all he was worth. Gilbert was resolved still to struggle on with Mossgiel, and Robert said, "there is my purse." The brothers, different as they were in the constitution of their souls, had one and the same heart. They loved one another—man and boy alike; and the survivor cleared, with pious hands, the weeds from his brother's grave. There was a blessing in that two hundred pounds—and thirty years afterwards Gilbert repaid it with interest to Robert's widow and children, by an Edition in which he wiped away stains from the reputation of his benefactor, which had been suffered to remain

too long, and some of which, the most difficult too to be effaced, had been even let fall from the fingers of a benevolent biographer who thought himself in duty bound to speak what he most mistakenly believed to be the truth. "Oh Robert!" was all his mother could say on his return to Mossgiel from Edinburgh. In her simple heart she was astonished at his fame, and could not understand it well, any more than she could her own happiness and her own pride. But his affection she understood better than he did, and far better still his generosity; and duly night and morning she asked a blessing on his head from Him who had given her such a son.

"Between the men of rustic life," said Burns—so at least it is reported—"and the polite world I observed little difference. In the former, though unpolished by fashion, and unenlightened by science, I have found much observation and much intelligence. But a refined and accomplished woman was a thing altogether new to me, and of which I had formed but a very inadequate idea." One of his biographers seems to have believed that his love for Jean Armour, the daughter of a Mauchline mason, must have died away under the more adequate ideas of the sex along with their corresponding emotions; and that he now married her with reluctance. Only think of Burns taking an Edinburgh Belle to wife! He flew, somewhat too feebly,

"To love's willing fetters, the arms of his Jean"

Her father had again to curse her for her infatuated love of her husband—for such if not by the law of Scotland—which may be doubtful—Burns certainly was by the law of heaven—and like a good Christian had again turned his daughter out of doors. Had Burns deserted her he had merely been a heartless villain. In making her his lawful wedded wife he did no more than any other man, deserving the name of man, in the same circumstances would have done; and had he not, he would have walked in shame before men, and in fear and trembling before God. But he did so, not only because it was his most sacred duty, but because he loved her better than ever, and without her would have been miserable. Much had she suffered for his sake, and

he for hers ; but all that distraction and despair which had nearly driven him into a sugar plantation, were over and gone, forgotten utterly, or remembered but as a dismal dream endearing the placid day that for ever dispelled 'it. He writes about her to Mrs. Dunlop and others in terms of sobriety and good sense—"The most placid good nature and sweetness of disposition ; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me ; vigorous health and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage by a more than commonly handsome figure"—these he thought in a woman might, with a knowledge of the scriptures, make a good wife. During the few months he was getting his house ready for her at Ellisland he frequently travelled, with all the fondness of a lover, the long wilderness of moors to Mauchline, where she was in the house of her austere father reconciled to her at last. And though he has told us that it was his custom, in song-writing, to keep the image of some fair maiden before the eye of his fancy, "some bright particular star," and that Hymen was not the divinity he then invoked, yet it was on one of these visits, between Ellisland and Moss-giel, that he penned under such homely inspiration as precious a love-offering as genius in the passion of hope ever laid in a virgin's bosom. His wife sung it to him that same evening—and indeed he never knew whether or no he had succeeded in any one of his lyrics, till he heard his words and the air together from her voice.

"Of a' the airts the wind can blaw,
I dearly like the west,
For there the bonnie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo'e best :
There wild woods grow, and rivers row,
And mony a hill between ;
But day and night my fancy's flight
Is ever wi' my Jean.

"I see her in the dewy flowers,
I see her sweet and fair :
I hear her in the tunefu' birds,
I hear her charm the air :
There's not a bonny flower that springs,
By fountain, shaw, or green,

There's not a bonny bird that sings,
But minds me o' my Jean.

“ Oh blaw ye westlin winds, blaw saft
Amang the leafy trees,
Wi' balmy gale, frae hill and dale,
Bring hame the laden bees;
And bring the lassie back to me
That's aye sae neat and clean;
Ae smile o' her wad banish care,
Sae charming is my Jean.

“ What sighs and vows among the knowes
Hae passed atween us twa!
How fond to meet, how wae to part,
That night she gaed awa!
The powers aboon can only ken,
To whom the heart is seen,
That nane can be sae dear to me
As my sweet lovely Jean.”

And here we ask you who may be reading these pages, to pause for a little, and consider with yourselves, what up to this time Burns had done to justify the condemnatory judgments that have been passed on his character as a man by so many admirers of his genius as a poet! Compared with men of ordinary worth, who have deservedly passed through life with the world's esteem, in what was it lamentably wanting? Not in tenderness, warmth, strength of the natural affections; and they are good till turned to evil. Not in the duties for which they were given, and which they make delights. Of which of these duties was he habitually neglectful? To the holiest of them all next to piety to his Maker, he was faithful beyond most—few better kept the fourth commandment. His youth, though soon too impassioned, had been long pure. If he were temperate by necessity and not nature, yet he was so as contentedly as if it had been by choice. He had lived on meal and water with some milk, because the family were too poor for better fare; and yet he rose to labor as the lark rises to sing.

In the corruption of our fallen nature he sinned, and, it has been said, became a libertine. Was he ever guilty of deliberate seduction? It is not so recorded; and we believe his whole

soul would have recoiled from such wickedness : but let us not affect ignorance of what we all know. Among no people on the face of the earth is the moral code so rigid, with regard to the intercourse of the sexes, as to stamp with ineffaceable disgrace every lapse from virtue ; and certainly not among the Scottish peasantry, austere as the spirit of religion has always been, and terrible ecclesiastical censure. Hateful in all eyes is the reprobate—the hoary sinner loathsome ; but many a grey head is now deservedly revered that would not be so, were the memory of all that has been repented by the Elder, and pardoned unto him, to rise up against him among the congregation as he entered the House of God. There has been many a rueful tragedy in houses that in after times “seemed asleep.” How many good and happy fathers of families, who, were all their past lives to be pictured in ghastly revelation to the eyes of their wives and children, could never again dare to look them in the face ! It pleased God to give them a long life ; and they have escaped, not by their own strength, far away from the shadows of their misdeeds that are not now suffered to pursue them, but are chained down in the past, no more to be let loose. That such things were, is a secret none now live to divulge ; and though once known, they were never emblazoned. But Burns and men like Burns showed the whole world their dark spots by the very light of their genius ; and having died in what may almost be called their youth, there the dark spots still are, and men point to them with their fingers, to whose eyes there may seem but small glory in all that effulgence.

Burns now took possession at Whitsuntide (1788) of the farm of Ellisland, while his wife remained at Mossgiel, completing her education in the dairy, till brought home next term to their new house, which the poet set a-building with alacrity, on a plan of his own, which was as simple a one as could be devised : kitchen and dining room in one, a double-bedded room with a bed-closet, and a garret. The site was pleasant, on the edge of a high bank of the Nith, commanding a wide and beautiful prospect,—holms, plains, woods, and hills, and a long reach of the sweeping river. While the house and offices were growing, he inhabited a hovel close at hand, and though occasionally giv

ing vent to some splenetic humors in letters indited in his sooty cabin, and now and then yielding to fits of despondency about the "ticklish situation of a family of children," he says to his friend Ainslie, "I am decidedly of opinion that the step I have taken is vastly for my happiness." He had to qualify himself for holding his excise commission by six weeks' attendance on the business of that profession at Ayr—and we have seen that he made several visits to Mossgiel. Currie cannot let him thus pass the summer without moralizing on his mode of life. "Pleased with surveying the grounds he was about to cultivate, and with the rearing of a building that should give shelter to his wife and children, and, as he fondly hoped, to his own grey hairs, sentiments of independence buoyed up his mind, pictures of domestic comfort and peace rose on his imagination; and a *few days* passed away, as he himself informs us, the most tranquil, if not the happiest, which he had ever experienced." Let us believe that such days were not few, but many, and that we need not join with the good Doctor in grieving to think that Burns led all the summer a wandering and unsettled life. It could not be stationary; but there is no reason to think that his occasional absence was injurious to his affairs on the farm. Currie writes as if he thought him incapable of self-guidance, and says, "It is to be lamented that at this critical period of his life, our poet was without the society of his wife and children. A great change had taken place in his situation; his old habits were broken; and the new circumstances in which he was placed, were calculated to give a new direction to his thoughts and conduct. But his application to the cares and labors of his farm was interrupted by several visits to his family in Ayrshire; and as the distance was too great for a single day's journey, he generally slept a night at an inn on the road. On such occasions he sometimes fell into company, and forgot the resolutions he had formed. In a little while temptation assailed him nearer home." This is treating Burns like a child, a person of so *facile* a disposition as not to be trusted without a keeper on the king's high-way. If he was not fit to ride by himself into Ayrshire, and there was no safety for him at Sanquhar, his case was hopeless out of an asylum. A trustwor-

thy friend attended to the farm as overseer, when he was from home ; potatoes, grass, and grain grew, though he was away ; on September 9th, we find him where he ought to be, " I am busy with my harvest ;" and on the 16th, " This hovel that I shelter in, is pervious to every blast that blows, and every shower that falls, and I am only preserved from being chilled to death by being suffocated with smoke. You will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside idle *éclat*, and bind every day after my reapers." Pity 'twas that there had not been a comfortable house ready furnished for Mrs. Burns to step into at the beginning of summer, therein to be brought to bed of " little Frank, who, by the by, I trust will be no discredit to the honorable name of Wallace, as he has a fine manly countenance, and a figure that might do credit to a little fellow two months older ; and likewise an excellent good temper, though when he pleases, he has a pipe not only quite so loud as the horn that his immortal namesake blew as a signal to take the pin out of Stirling bridge."

Dear good old blind Dr. Blacklock, about this time, was anxious to know from Burns himself how he was thriving, and indited to him a pleasant epistle.

" Dear Burns, thou brother of my heart,
Both for thy virtues and thy art ;
If art it may be call'd in thee,
Which Nature's bounty, large and free,
With pleasure in thy heart diffuses,
And warms thy soul with all the Muses.
Whether to laugh with easy grace,
Thy numbers move the sage's face,
Or bid the softer passions rise,
And ruthless souls with grief surprise,
'Tis Nature's voice distinctly felt
Through thee her organ, thus to melt.

" Most anxiously I wish to know,
With thee of late how matters go ;
How keeps thy much-loved Jean her health ?
What promises thy farm of wealth ?
Whether the muse persists to smile,
And all thy anxious cares beguile ?
Whether bright fancy keeps alive ?
And how thy darling infants thrive ?"

It appears from his reply, that Burns had entrusted Heron with a letter to Blacklock, which the preacher had not delivered, and the poet exclaims

“The ill-thief blaw the Heron south !
 And never drink be near his drouth !
 He tald mysel by word o’ mouth
 He’d tak my letter ;
 I lippened to the chiel in trouth
 And bade nae better.

“But aiblins honest Master Heron,
 Had at the time some dainty fair one,
 To ware his theologic care on,
 And holy study ;
 And tir’d o’ sauls to waste his lear on,
 E’en tried the body.”

Currie says in a note, “Mr. Heron, author of the *History of Scotland* lately published, and among various other works, of a *respectable* life of our poet himself.” Burns knew his character well ; the unfortunate fellow had talents of no ordinary kind, and there are many good things and much good writing in his life of Burns ; but respectable it is not, basely calumnious, and the original source of many of the worst falsehoods even now believed too widely to be truths, concerning the moral character of a man as far superior to himself in virtue as in genius. Burns then tells his venerated friend, that he has absolutely become a gauger.

“Ye glaikit, gleesome, dainty damies,
 Wha by Castalia’s wimpling streamies,
 Loup, sing, and lave your pretty limbies,
 Ye ken, ye ken,
 That strang necessity supreme is,
 ’Mang sons o’ men.

“I hae a wife and twa wee laddies,
 They maun hae brose and brats o’ duddies ;
 Ye ken yoursels my heart right proud is,
 I need na vaunt,
 But I’ll sned besoms—thraw saugh woodies,
 Before they wan

“ Lord help me thro’ this world o’ care !
 I’m weary sick o’t late and air !
 Not but I hae a richer share
 Than mony ithers ;
 But why should ae man better fare,
 And a’ men brithers ?

“ Come, FIRM RESOLVE, take thou the van,
 Thou stalk o’ carl-hemp in man !
 And let us mind, faint heart ne’er wan
 A lady fair ;
 Wha does the utmost that he can,
 Will whiles do mair.

“ But to conclude my silly rhyme
 (I’m scant o’ verse, and scant o’ time),
 TO MAKE A HAPPY FIRE-SIDE CLIME
 TO WEANS AND WIFE,
 THAT’S THE TRUE PATHOS AND SUBLIME,
 OF HUMAN LIFE.”

These noble stanzas were written towards the end of October, and in another month Burns brought his wife home to Ellisland, and his three children, for she had twice borne him twins. The happiest period of his life, we have his own words for it, was that winter.

But why not say that the three years he lived at Ellisland were all happy, as happiness goes in this world ? As happy perhaps as they might have been had he been placed in some other condition apparently far better adapted to yield him what all human hearts do most desire. His wife never had an hour’s sickness, and was always cheerful as day, one of those

“ Sound healthy children of the God of heaven,”

whose very presence is positive pleasure, and whose contentedness with her lot inspires comfort into a husband’s heart, when at times oppressed with a mortal heaviness that no words could lighten. Burns says with gloomy grandeur, “ There is a foggy atmosphere native to my soul in the hour of care which makes the dreary objects seem larger than life.” The objects seen by imagination ; and he who suffers thus cannot be relieved by any

direct applications to that faculty, only by those that touch the heart—the homelier the more sanative, and none so sure as a wife's affectionate ways, quietly moving about the house affairs, which, insignificant as they are in themselves, are felt to be little truthful realities that banish those monstrous phantoms, showing them to be but glooms and shadows.

And how fared the Gauger? Why he did his work. Currie says, "his farm no longer occupied the principal part of his care or his thoughts. It was not at Ellisland that he was now in general to be found. Mounted on horseback, this high-minded poet was pursuing the defaulters of the revenue among the hills and vales of Nithsdale; his roving eye wandering over the charms of nature, and muttering his wayward fancies as he moved along." And many a happy day he had when thus riding about the country in search of smugglers of all sorts, zealous against all manner of contraband. He delighted in the broad brow of the day, whether glad or gloomy, like his own forehead; in the open air whether still or stormy, like his own heart. "While pursuing the defaulters of the revenue," a gauger has not always to track them by his eyes or his nose. Information has been lodged of their whereabouts, and he deliberately makes a seizure. Sentimentalists may see in this something very shocking to the delicate pleasures of susceptible minds, but Burns did not; and some of his sweetest lyrics, redolent of the liquid dew of youth, were committed to whitey-brown not scented by the rose's attar. Burns on duty was always as sober as a judge. A man of his sense knew better than to muddle his brains, when it was needful to be quick-witted and ready-handed too; for he had to do with old women who were not to be sneezed at, and middle-aged men who could use both club and cutlass.

"He held them with his glittering eye;"

but his determined character was not the worse of being exhibited on broad shoulders. They drooped, as you know, but from the habits of a strong man who had been a laborer from his youth upwards, and a gauger's life was the very one that might have been prescribed to a man like him, subject to low

spirits, by a wise physician. Smugglers themselves are seldom drunkards—gaugers not often—though they take their dran., your drunkards belong to that comprehensive class that chea. the excise.

Then Burns was not always “mounted on horseback pursuing the defaulters of the revenue among the hills and vales of Nithsdale ;” he sat sometimes by himself in Friar’s-Carse Hermitage.

“Thou whom chance may hither lead,—
Be thou clad in russet weed,
Be thou deck’t in silken stole,
Grave these counsels on thy soul.

“Life is but a day at most,
Sprung from night, in darkness lost;
Hope not sunshine ev’ry hour,
Fear not clouds will always lower.

“As the shades of ev’ning close,
Beck’ning thee to long repose ;
As life itself becomes disease,
Seek the chimney-neuk of ease.
There ruminate with sober thought,
On all thou’st seen, and heard, and wrought ;
And teach the sportive younkers round,
Saws of experience, sage and sound.
Say, man’s true, genuine estimate,
The grand criterion of his fate,
Is not, Art thou high or low ?
Did thy fortune ebb or flow ?
Did many talents gild thy span ?
Or frugal nature grudge thee one ?
Tell them, and press it on their mind,
As thou thyself must shortly find,
The smile or frown of awful heav’n,
To virtue or to vice is giv’n.
Say to be just, and kind, and wise,
There solid self-enjoyment lies ;
That foolish, selfish, faithless ways,
Lead to the wretched, vile and base

“Thus resign’d and quiet, creep
To the bed of lasting sleep,

Sleep, whence thou shalt ne'er awake,
Night, where dawn shall never break,
Till future life, future no more,
To light and joy the good restore,
To light and joy unknown before.

"Stranger, go. Heav'n be thy guide!
Quod the beadsman of Nith-side."

Burns acquired the friendship of many of the best families in the vale of Nith, at Friar's Carse, Terraughty, Blackwood, Closeburn, Dalswinton, Glenae, Kirkconnel, Arbigland, and other seats of the gentry old or new. Such society was far more enjoyable than that of Edinburgh, for here he was not a lion but a man. He had his jovial hours, and sometimes they were excessive, as the whole world knows from "the Song of the Whistle." But the Laureate did not enter the lists—if he had, it is possible he might have conquered Craigdarroch. These were formidable orgies; but we have heard "Oh! Willie brewed a peck o' maun," sung after a presbytery dinner, the bass of the moderator giving somewhat of a solemn character to the chorus.

But why did Burns allow his genius to lie idle—why did he not construct some great work, such as a Drama? His genius did not lie idle, for over and above the songs alluded to, he wrote ever so many for his friend Johnson's Museum. Nobody would have demanded from him a Drama, had he not divulged his determination to compose one about "The Bruce," with the homely title of "Rob M'Quechan's Elshin." But Burns did not think himself an universal genius, and at this time writes, "No man knows what nature has fitted him for till he try; and if after a preparatory course of some years' study of men and books I shall find myself unequal to the task, there is no harm done. Virtue and study are their own reward. I have got Shakspeare, and begun with him," &c. He knew that a great National Drama was not to be produced as easily as "The Cot-tar's Saturday Night;" and says, "though the rough material of fine writing is undoubtedly the gift of genius, the workmanship is as certainly the united efforts of labor, attention, and pains."

And here, one day between breakfast and dinner he composed "Tam o' Shanter." The fact is hardly credible, but we are willing to believe it. Dorset only corrected his famous "To all ye ladies now on land, we men at sea indite," the night before an expected engagement, a proof of his self-possession; but he had been working at it for days. Dryden dashed off his "Alexander's Feast" in no time, but the labor of weeks was bestowed on it before it assumed its present shape. "Tam o' Shanter" is superior in force and fire to that Ode. Never did genius go at such a gallop—setting off at score, and making play, but without whip or spur, from starting to winning post. All is inspiration. His wife with her weans a little way aside among the broom watched him at work as he was striding up and down the brow of the Scaur, and reciting to himself like one *demented*,

"Now Tam, O Tam ! had they been queans,
A' plump and strapping, in their teens ;
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linen !
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' guid blue hair,
I wad hae gi'n them aff my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies !"

His bonnie Jean must have been sorely perplexed—but she was familiar with all his moods, and like a good wife left him to his cogitations. It is "all made out of the builder's brain;" for the story that suggested it is no story after all, the dull lie of a drunkard dotard. From the poet's imagination it came forth a perfect poem, impregnated with the native spirit of Scottish superstition. Few or none of our old traditionary tales of witches are very appalling—they had not their origin in the depths of the people's heart—there is a meanness in their mysteries—the ludicrous mixes with the horrible—much matter there is for the poetical, and more perhaps for the picturesque—but the pathetic is seldom found there—and never—for Shakspeare we fear was not a Scotsman—the sublime. Let no man therefore find fault with "Tam o' Shanter," because it strikes not

a deeper chord. It strikes a chord that twangs strangely, and we know not well what it means. To vulgar eyes, too, were such unaccountable on-goings most often revealed of old : such seers were generally *doited or dazed*—half-born idiots or *neerdoweels in drink*. Had Milton's Satan shown his face in Scotland, folk either would not have known him, or thought him mad. The devil is much indebted to Burns for having raised his character without impairing his individuality—

“ O thou ! whatever tittle suit thee,
Auld Hornie, Satan, Nick, or Clootie,
Wha in yon cavern grim an' sootie,
Closed under hatches,
Spairges about the brumstane cootie,
To scaud poor wretches.

“ Hear me, auld *Hangie*, for a wee,
An' let poor damned bodies be ;
I'm sure sma' pleasure it can gie,
E'en to a *de'il*,
To skelp an' scaud poor dogs like me,
An' hear us squeel ?”

This is conciliatory ; and we think we see him smile. We can almost believe for a moment, that it does give him no great pleasure, that he is not inaccessible to pity, and at times would fain devolve his duty upon other hands, though we cannot expect him to resign. The poet knows that he is the Prince of the Air.

“ Great is thy pow'r an' great thy fame ;
Far kend and noted is thy name ;
An' tho' yon lowin heugh's thy hame,
Thou travels far ;
An' faith ! thou's neither lag nor lame,
Nor blate nor scaur.

“ Whyles, ranging like a roarin lion,
For prey, a' holes an' corners tryin' ;
Whyles on the strong-wing'd tempest flyin',
Tirling the kirks ;
Whyles, in the human bosom prying,
Unseen thou lurks’

That is magnificent—Milton's self would have thought so—and it could have been written by no man who had not studied scripture. The Address is seen to take ; the Old Intrusionist is glorified by "tirling the kirks ;" and the poet thinks it right to lower his pride.

"I've heard my reverend Grannie say,

In lanely glens ye like to stray :

Or where auld-ruin'd castles, grey,

Nod to the moon,

Ye fright the nightly wand'rer's way,

Wi' eldritch croon.

"When twilight did my Grannie summon

To say her prayers, douce, honest woman !

Aft yont the dyke she's heard you bummin,

Wi' eerie drone ;

Or, rustlin' through the boortrees comin'

Wi' heavy groan.

"Ae dreary, windy, winter night,

The stars shot down wi' sklentint' light,

Wi' you, mysel, I gat a fright,

Ayont the lough ;

Ye, like a rash-bush, stood in sight,

Wi' waving sugh."

Throughout the whole Address, the elements are so combined in him, as to give the world "assurance o' a deil ;" but then it is the Deil of Scotland.

Just so in "Tam o' Shanter." We know not what some great German genius like Goethe might have made of him ; but we much mistake the matter, if "Tam o' Shanter" at Alloway Kirk be not as exemplary a piece of humanity as Faustus on May-day Night upon the Hartz Mountains. Faust does not well know what he would be at, but Tam does ; and though his views of human life be rather hazy, he has glimpses given him of the invisible world. His wife—but her tongue was no scandal—calls him

"A skellum,

A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum ;

That frae November till October,

Ae market-day thou was nae sober,

That ilka melder, wi' the miller,

Thou sat as lang as thou had siller ;

That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
 The smith and thee gat roaring fou on,
 That at the L—d's house, ev'n on Sunday,
 Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday.
 She prophesy'd, that late or soon,
 Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon;
 Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
 By Alloway's auld haunted kirk."

That is her view of the subject ; but what is Tam's ? The same as Wordsworth's,—“ He sits down to his cups, while the storm is roaring, and heaven and earth are in confusion ; the night is driven on by song and tumultuous noise ; laughter and jests thicken as the beverage improves upon the palate ; conjugal fidelity archly bends to the service of general benevolence ; selfishness is not absent, but wearing the mask of social cordiality ; and while these various elements of humanity are blended into one proud and happy composition of elated spirits, the anger of the tempest without doors only heightens and sets off the enjoyment within. I pity him who cannot perceive that, in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect.

‘Kings may be blest but Tam was glorious,
 O'er a' the *ills* of life victorious.’

What a lesson do these words convey of charitable indulgence for the vicious habits of the principal actor in the scene and of those who resemble him ! Men who, to the rigidly virtuous, are objects almost of loathing, and whom therefore they cannot serve. The poet, penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things, has unveiled, with exquisite skill, the finer ties of imagination and feeling that often bind those beings to practices productive of much unhappiness to themselves and to those whom it is their duty to cherish ; and as far as he puts the reader into possession of this intelligent sympathy, he qualifies him for exercising a salutary influence over the minds of those who are thus deplorably deceived.”

We respectfully demur from the opinion of this wise and benign judge, that “ there was no moral purpose in all this, though there is a moral effect.” So strong was his moral purpose and

so deep the moral feeling moved within him by the picture he had so vividly imagined, that Burns pauses, in highest moral mood, at the finishing touch,

“Kings may be blest but Tam was glorious ;”

and then, by imagery of unequalled loveliness, illustrates an universal and everlasting truth :

“But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow’r, its bloom is shed
Or like the snow-falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever ;
Or like the borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place ;
Or like the rainbow’s lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm.”

Next instant he returns to Tam ; and, humanized by that exquisite poetry, we cannot help being sorry for him “mountin’ his beast in sic a night.” At the first clap of thunder he forgets Souter Johnny—how “conjugal fidelity archly bent to the service of general benevolence”—such are the terms in which the philosophical Wordsworth speaks of

“The landlady and Tam grew gracious ;
Wi’ favors, secret, sweet, and precious :”

and as the haunted Ruin draws nigh, he remembers not only Kate’s advice but her prophecy. He has passed by some fearful places ; at the slightest touch of the necromancer, how fast one after another wheels by, telling at what a rate Tam rode ! And we forget that we are not riding behind him,

“When, glimmering thro’ the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem’d in a bleeze !”

We defy any man of woman born to tell us who these witches and warlocks are, and why the devil brought them here into Alloway-Kirk. True

“This night a child might understand,
The deil had business on his hand ;”

but that is not the question—the question is *what* business? Was it a ball given him on the anniversary of the Fall?

“There sat auld Nick, in shape o’ beast;
A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge:”

and pray who is to pay the piper? We fear that young witch Nannie!

“For Satan glow’r’d, and fided fu’ fain,
And hotch’d and blew wi’ might and main:”

and this may be the nuptial night of the Prince—for that tyke is he—of the Fallen Angels!

How was Tam able to stand the sight, “glorious and heroic” as he was, of the open presses?

“Coffins stood round like open presses,
That shaw’d the dead in their last dresses;
And by some devilish cantraip slight,
Each in its cauld hand held a light.”

Because show a man some sight that is altogether miraculously dreadful, and he either faints or feels no fear. Or say rather, let a man stand the first *glower* at it, and he will make comparatively light of the details. There was Auld Nick himself, there was no mistaking him, and there were

“Wither’d beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Lowping an’ flinging—”

to such dancing what cared Tam who held the candle? He was bedevilled, bewarlocked and bewitched, and therefore

“Able
To note upon the haly table,
A murderer’s banes in gibbet airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen’d bairns;
A thief, new-cuttet frae a rape,
Wi’ his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks, wi’ bluid red rusted,
Five scimitars, wi’ murder crusted;

A garter, which a babe had strangled ;
A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,
The grey hairs yet stack to the heft."

This collection has all the effect of a selection. The bodies were not placed there ; but following each other's heels, they stretched themselves out of their own accord upon the haly table. They had received a summons to the festival, which murderer and murdered must obey. But mind ye, Tam could not see what you see. Who told him that *that* garter had strangled a babe ? That *that* was a parricide's knife ? Nobody—and that is a flaw. For Tam looks with his bodily eyes only, and can know only what they show him ; but Burns knew it, and believed Tam knew it too ; and we know it for Burns tells us, and we believe Tam as wise as ourselves ; for we almost turn Tam—the poet himself being the only real warlock of them all.

You know why that Haly Table is so pleasant to the apples of all those evil eyes ? They feed upon the dead, not merely because they love wickedness, but because they inspire it into the quick. Who ever murdered his father but at the instigation of that "towzie tyke, black, grim, and large ?" Who but for him ever strangled her new-born child ? Scimitars and tomahawks ! Why, such weapons never were in use in Scotland. True. But they have long been in use in the wilderness of the western world, and among the orient cities of Mahoun, and his empire extends to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And here we shall say a few words, which perhaps were expected from us when speaking a little while ago of some of his first productions, about Burns's humorous strains, more especially those in which he has sung the praises of joviality and good fellowship, as it has been thought by many, that in them are conspicuously displayed not only some striking qualities of his poetical genius, but likewise of his personal character. Among the countless number of what are called convivial songs floating in our literature, how few seem to have been inspired by such a sense and spirit of social enjoyment as men can sympathize with in their ordinary moods, when withdrawn from the festive board, and engaged without blame in the common amusements or recre-

ations of a busy or studious life! The finest of these few have been gracefully and gaily thrown off, in some mirthful minute, by Shakspeare and Ben Jonson and "the Rest," inebriating the mind as with "divine gas" into sudden exhilaration that passes away not only without headache, but with heartache for a time allayed by the sweet *afflatus*. In our land, too, as in Greece of old, genius has imbibed inspiration from the wine-cup, and sung of human life in strains befitting poets who desired that their foreheads should perpetually be wreathed with flowers. But putting aside them and their little lyres, with some exceptions, how nauseous are the bacchanalian songs of Merry England!

On this topic we but touch; and request you to recollect, that there are not half a dozen, if so many, drinking songs in all Burns. "Willie brewed a peck o' maut," is, indeed, the chief; and you cannot even look at it without crying, "O rare Rob Burns!" So far from inducing you to believe that the poet was addicted to drinking, the freshness and fervor of its glee convince you that it came gushing out of a healthful heart, in the exhilaration of a night that needed not the influence of the flowing bowl, which friendship, nevertheless, did so frequently replenish. Wordsworth, who has told the world that he is a water drinker, and in the lake country he can never be at a loss for his favorite beverage, regards this song with the complacency of a philosopher, knowing well that it is all a pleasant exaggeration; and that had the moon not lost patience and gone to bed, she would have seen "Rob and Allan" on their way back to Ellisland, along the bold banks of the Nith, as steady as a brace of bishops.

Of the contest immortalized in the "Whistle," it may be observed, that in the course of events it is likely to be as rare as enormous; and that as centuries intervened between Sir Robert Laurie's victory over the Dane in the reign of James VI., and Craighdarroch's victory over Sir Robert Laurie in that of George III., so centuries, in all human probability, will elapse before another such battle will be lost and won. It is not a little amusing to hear good Dr. Currie on this passage in the life of Burns. In the text of his Memoir he says, speaking of the poet's intimacy with the best families in Nithsdale, "Their so-

cial parties too often seduced him from his rustic labors and his rustic fare, overthrew the unsteady fabric of his resolutions, *and inflamed those propensities which temperance might have weakened, and prudence ultimately suppressed.*" In a note he adds in illustration, "The poem of the Whistle celebrates a bacchanalian event among the gentlemen of Nithsdale, where Burns appears as umpire. Mr. Riddell died before our bard, and some elegiac verses to his memory will be found in Volume IV. From him and from all the members of his family, Burns received not kindness, but friendship; *and the society he met with in general at Friar's Carse was calculated to improve his habits, as well as his manners.* Mr. Fergusson of Craigdarroch, *so well known for his eloquence and social habits*, died soon after our poet. Sir Robert Laurie, the third person in the drama, survives; and has since been engaged in contests of a bloodier nature—long may he live to fight the battles of his country! (1799)." Three better men lived not in the shire; but they were gentlemen, and Burns was but an exciseman; and Currie, unconsciously influenced by an habitual deference to rank, pompously moralizes on the poor poet's "propensities, which temperance might have weakened, and prudence ultimately suppressed;" while in the same breath, and with the same ink, he eulogises the rich squire for "his eloquence and social habits," so well calculated to "improve the habits, as well as the manners," of the bard and gauger! Now suppose that "the heroes" had been not Craigdarroch, Glenriddel, and Maxwellton, but Burns, Mitchell, and Findlater, a gauger, a supervisor, and a collector of excise, and that the contest had taken place not at Friar's-Carse, but at Ellisland, not for a time-honored hereditary ebony whistle, but a wooden ladle not a week old, and that Burns the Victorious had acquired an implement more elegantly fashioned, though of the same materials, than the one taken from his mouth the moment he was born, what blubbing would there not have been among his biographers! James Currie, how exhortatory! Josiah Walker, how lachrymose!

"Next uprose our Bard like a prophet in drink:

'Craigdarroch, thou'lt soar when creation shall sink!

But if thou would flourish immortal in rhyme,
Come—one bottle more—and have at the sublime !

“ Thy line, they have struggled for Freedom with Bruce,
Shall heroes and patriots ever produce :
So thine be the laurel, and mine be the bay ;
The field thou hast won, by yon bright god of day ! ”

How very shocking ! Then only hear in what a culpable spirit Burns writes to Riddel, on the forenoon of the day of battle !—
“ Sir, Big with the idea of this important day at Friar’s-Carse, I have invoked the elements and skies in the fond persuasion that they would announce it to the astonished world by some phenomena of terrific import. Yester-night, until a very late hour, did I wait with anxious horror for the appearance of some comet firing half the sky ; or aerial armies of conquering Scandinavians, darting athwart the startled heavens, rapid as the ragged lightning, and horrid as those convulsions of nature that bury nations. The elements, however, seem to take the matter very quietly ; they did not even usher in this morning with triple suns and a shower of blood, symbolical of the three potent heroes, and the mighty claret-shed of the day. For me, as Thomson in his *Winter* says of the storm, I shall ‘ *Hear* astonished, and astonished sing.’ To leave the heights of Parnassus and come to the humble vale of prose, I have some misgivings that I take too much upon me, when I request you to get your guest, Sir Robert Laurie, to post the two inclosed covers for me, the one of them to Sir William Cunninghame, of Robertland, Bart., Kilmarnock—the other to Mr. Allen Masterton, writing-master, Edinburgh. The first has a kindred claim on Sir Robert, as being a brother baronet, and likewise a keen Foxite ; the other is one of the worthiest men in the world, and a man of real genius ; so allow me to say, he has a fraternal claim on you. I want them franked for to-morrow, as I cannot get them to the post to-night. I shall send a servant again for them in the evening. Wishing that your head may be crowned with laurels to-night, and free from aches to-morrow, I have the honor to be, sir, your deeply-indebted and obedient servant, R. B.” Why, you see that this “ Letter,” and “ The Whistle ”—perhaps an improper poem in priggish

eyes, but in the eyes of Bacchus the best of triumphal odes—make up the whole of Burns's share in this transaction. *He was not at the Carse.* The "three potent heroes" were too thoroughly gentlemen to have asked a fourth to sit by with an empty bottle before him as umpire of that debate. Burns that evening was sitting with his eldest child on his knee, teaching it to say Dad—that night he was lying in his own bed, with bonnie Jean by his side—and "yon bright god of day" saluted him at morning on the Scaur above the glittering Nith.

Turn to the passages in his youthful poetry, where he speaks of himself or others "wi' just a drappie in their ee." Would you that he had never written Death and Dr. Hornbook?

"The clachan yill had made me canty,
I was na fou, but just had plenty;
I stacher'd whyles, but yet took tent ay
To free the ditches;
An' hillocks, stanes, an' bushes, kenn'd ay
Frae ghaists an' witches.

"The rising moon began to glow'r
The distant Cumnock hills out-owre:
To count her horns, wi' a' my pow'r,
I set mysel;
But whether she had three or four,
I cou'd na tell.

"I was come round about the hill,
And toddlin down on Willie's mill,
Setting my staff wi' a' my skill,
To keep me sicker:
Tho' leeward whyles, against my will,
I took a bicker.

"I there wi' SOMETHING did forgather," &c.

Then and there, as you learn, ensued that "celestial colloquy divine," which being reported drove the doctor out of the country, by unextinguishable laughter, into Glasgow, where half a century afterwards he died universally respected. SOMETHING had more to say, and long before that time Burns had been sobered.

“But just as he began to tell,
 The auld kirk-hammer strak the bell
 Some wee short hour ayont the twal,
 Which rais'd us baith :
I took the way that pleas'd mysel',
 And sae did Death.”

In those pregnant Epistles to his friends, in which his generous and noble character is revealed so sincerely, he now and then alludes to the socialities customary in Kyle ; and the good people of Scotland have always enjoyed such genial pictures. When promising himself the purest pleasures society can afford, in company with “Auld Lapraik,” whom he warmly praises for the tenderness and truthfulness of his “sangs”—

“There was ae sang, amang the rest,
 Aboon them a' it pleased me best,
 That some kind husband had addrest
 To some sweet wife :
 It thirl'd the heart-strings thro' the breast,
 A' to the life ;”

and when luxuriating in the joy of conscious genius holding communion with the native muse, he exclaims—

“Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,
 That's a' the learning I desire ;
 Then tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire
 At pleugh or cart,
 My muse, though hamely in attire,
 May touch the heart ;”

where does Burns express a desire to meet his brother-bard ? Where but in the resorts of their fellow-laborers, when released from toil, and flinging weariness to the wind, they flock into the heart of some holiday, attired in sunshine, and feeling that life is life ?

“But Mauchline race, or Mauchline fair,
 I should be proud to meet you there ;
 We'se gie ae night's discharge to care,
 If we forgather,
 An' hae a swap o' *rhymen-ware*
 Wi' ane anither.

"The four-gill chap, we'se gar him clatter,
An' kirsen him wi' reekin water ;
Syne we'll sit down an' tak our whitter,
To cheer our heart ;
An' faith we'se be acquainted better
Before we part.

"Awa, ye selfish warly race,
 Wha think that havins, sense, an' grace,
 Ev'n love an' friendship, should give place
 To catch the plack!
 I dinna like to see your face,
 Nor hear your crack

“ But ye whom social pleasure charms,
Whose hearts the tide of kindness warms,
Who hold your *being* on the terms,
 ‘ Each aid the others,’
Come to my bowl, come to my arms,
 My friends, my brothers ! ”

Yet after all, "the four-gill chap" clattered but on paper Lapraik was an elderly man of sober life, impoverished by a false friend in whom he had confided; and Burns, who wore good clothes, and paid his tailor as punctually as the men he dealt with, had not much money out of seven pounds a year, to spend in "the change-house." He allowed no man to pay his "lawin," but neither was he given to treating—save the sex; and in his "Epistle to James Smith," he gives a more correct account of his habits, when he goes thus off careeringly—

"My pen I here fling to the door,
And kneel : ' Ye Powers !' and warm implore,
Tho' I should wander *terra* o'er
In all her climes :
Grant me but this—I ask no more—
Ay rowth o' rhymes.

“ While ye are pleas’d to keep me hale,
I’ll sit down o’er my scanty meal,
Be’t water-brose, or muslin-kail,
Wi’ cheerfu’ face,
As lang’s the Muses dinna fail
To say the grace.”

Read the "Auld Farmer's New-Year Morning Salutation to his Auld Maré Maggie." Not a soul but them-two-selves is in the stable—in the farm-yard—nor as far as we think of, in the house. Yes—there is one in the house—but she is somewhat infirm, and not yet out of bed. Sons and daughters have long since been married, and have houses of their own—such of them as may not have been buried. The servants are employed somewhere else out of doors—and so are the "four gallant brutes as e'er did draw" a moiety of Maggie's "bairn-time." The Address is an Autobiography. The master remembers himself, along with his mare—in days when she was "dappl't, sleek, and glaizie, a bonnie grey;" and he "the pride o' a' the parishen."

"That day we pranc'd wi muckle pride,
When ye bure hame my bonnie bride;
An' sweet an' gracefu' she did ride,
Wi' maiden air!
Kyle Stewart I could bragged wide,
For sic a pair."

What passages in their common life does he next select to "roose" mare and master? "In tug or tow?" In cart, plough, or harrow? These all rise before him at the right time, and in a cheerful spirit; towards the close of his address he grows serious, but not sad—as well he may; and at the close, as well he may, tender and grateful. But the image he sees galloping, next to that of the Broose, comes second, because it is second best:

"When thou an' I were young an' skeigh,
An' stable-meals at fairs were dreigh,
How thou wad prance, an' snore, an' skreigh,
An' tak the road!
Town's bodies ran, and stood abeigh,
An' ca't thee mad."

"*When thou wast corn't, an' I was mellow,*
We took the road ay like a swallow?"

We do not blame the old farmer for having got occasionally mellow some thirty years ago—we do not blame Burns for mak-

ing him pride himself on his shame ; nay, we bless them both as we hear these words whispered close to the old Mare's lug :

“ Monie a sair daurk we twa hae wrought,
An’ wi’ the weary warl’ fought!
An’ monie an anxious day I thought
We wad be beat!
Yet here to crazy age we’re brought,
Wi’ something yet.

"And think na, my auld trusty servan',
 That now perhaps thou's less deservin,
 An' thy auld days may end in starvin,
 For my last *fou*,
 A heapit *stimpert*, I'll reserve ane
 Laid by for you.

“ We’ve worn to crazy years thegither :
We’ll toyte about wi’ ane anither ;
Wi’ tentie care I’ll flit thy tether,
To some hain’d rig,
Whare ye may nobly rax your leather,
Wi’ sma’ fatigue.”

Or will you turn to "The Twa Dogs," and hear Luath, in whom the best humanities mingle with the canine—the Poet's own colley, whom some cruel wretch murdered; and gibbeted to everlasting infamy would have been the murderer, had Burns but known his name?

“The dearest comfort o’ their lives,
Their grushie weans an’ faithfu’ wives;
The prattling things are just their pride,
That sweetens a’ their fireside

“An’ whiles twalpenney worth o’ nappy
Can mak the bodiees unco happy ;
They lay aside their private cares,
To mend the Kirk and State affairs :
They’ll talk o’ patronage and priests,
Wi’ kindling fury in their breasts,
Or tell what new taxation’s comin,
An’ ferlie at the folk in Lon’on.

“ As bleak-fac’d Hallowmass returns,
 They get the jovial, rantin kirns,
 When rural life, o’ every station,
 Unite in common recreation;
 Love blinks, Wit slaps, an’ social Mirth
 Forgets there’s Care upo’ the earth.

“ That merry day the year begins,
 They bar the door on frosty winds;
 The nappy reeks wi’ mantling ream;
 An’ sheds a heart-inspiring steam;
 The luntin pipe, and sneeshin mill,
 Are handed round wi’ richt guid will;
 The cantie auld folks crackin crouse,
 The young anes rantin thro’ the house,
 My heart has been sae fain to see them,
 That I for joy hae barkit wi’ them.”

Yet how happens it that in the “Halloween” no mention is made of this source of enjoyment, and that the parties concerned pursue the ploy with unflagging passion through all its charms and spells? Because the festival is kept alive by the poetic power of superstition that night awakened from its slumber in all those simple souls; and *that* serves instead of strong drink. They fly from freak to freak, without a thought but of the witcheries—the means and appliances needful to make them potent; this Burns knew to be nature, and therefore he delays all “creature comforts” till the end, when the curtain has dropped on that visionary stage, and the actors return to the floor of their everyday world. Then—

“ Wi’ merry sangs, an’ friendly cracks,
 I wat they didna weary;
 An’ unco’ tales, an’ funny jokes,
 Their sports were cheap an’ cheery,
 Till *butter’d so’ns*, wi’ fragrant lunt,
 Set a’ their gabs a-steerin;
 Syne, wi’ a social glass o’ strunt,
 They parted aff careerin
 Fu’ blythe that night.”

We see no reason why, in the spirit of these observations, moralists may not read with pleasure and approbation, “The

Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer to the Scotch Representatives in the House of Commons." Its political economy is as sound as its patriotism is stirring; and he must be indeed a dunce who believes that Burns uttered it either as a defence or an encouragement of a national vice, or that it is calculated to stimulate poor people into pernicious habits. It is an address that Cobbett, had he been a Scotsman and one of the Forty-Five, would have rejoiced to lay on the table of the House of Commons; for Cobbett, in all that was best of him, was a kind of Burns in his way, and loved the men who work. He maintained the cause of malt, and it was a leading article in the creed of his faith that the element distilled therefrom is like the air they breathe, if the people have it not, they die. Beer may be best; and Burns was the champion of beer, as well as of what bears a brisker name. He spoke of it in "The Earnest Cry," and likewise in the "Scotch Drink," as one of the staffs of life which had been struck from the poor man's hand by fiscal oppression. Tea was then little practised in Ayrshire cottages; and we do not at this moment remember the word in Burns's Poems. He threatens a rising if Ministers will not obey the voice of the People:

"Auld Scotland has a raucle tongue;
 She's just a devil wi' a rung;
 An' if she promise auld or young
 To tak their part,
 Tho' by the neck she should be strung,
 She'll no desert."

In the Postscript, the patriotism and poetry of "The Earnest Cry" wax stronger and brighter—and no drunkard would dare to read aloud in the presence of men—by heart he never could get it—such a strain as this—familiar to many million ears:

"Let half-starv'd slaves, in warmer skies,
 See future wines, rich clust'ring, rise;
 Their lot auld Scotland ne'er envies,
 But blythe and frisky,
 She eyes her freeborn, martial boys,
 Tak aff their whisky."

“What tho’ their Phœbus kinder warms,
 While fragrance blooms, and beauty charms;
 When wretches range, in famish’d swarms,
 The scented groves,
 Or hounded forth, dishonor arms
 In hungry droves.

“Their gun’s a burden on their shouther;
 They downa bide the stink o’ powther;
 Their bauldest thought’s a hank’ring swither
 To stan’ or rin,
 Till skelp—a shot—they’re aff, a’ throwther,
 To save their skin.

“But bring a Scotsman frae his hill,
 Clap in his cheek a Highland gill,
 Say, such is Royal George’s will,
 An’ there’s the foe,
 He has nae thought but how to kill
 Twa at a blow.

“Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him;
 Death comes, wi’ fearless eye he sees him;
 Wi’ bluidy hand a welcome gies him:
 An’ when he fa’s,
 His latest draught o’ breathin lea’es him
 In faint huzzas.”

These are not the sentiments of a man who “takes an enemy into his mouth to steal away his brains.” Nor is there anything to condemn, when looked at in the light with which genius invests them, in the pictures presented to us in “Scotch Drink,” of some of the familiar scenes of humble life, whether of busy work, or as busy recreation, and some of home-felt incidents interesting to all that live—such as “when skirlin weanies see the light”—animated and invigorated to the utmost pitch of tension, beyond the reach of the jaded spirits of the laboring poor—so at least the poet makes us for the time willing to believe—when unaided by that elixir he so fervidly sings. Who would wish the following lines expunged? Who may not, if he chooses, so qualify their meaning as to make them true? Who will not pardon the first two, if they need pardon, for sake of the last two that need none? For surely you, who though guilty of no

excess, fare sumptuously every day, will not find it in your hearts to grudge the "poor man's wine" to the Cottar after that "Saturday Night" of his, painted for you to the life by his own son, Robert Burns!

"Thou clears the head o' doited lear;
 Thou cheers the heart o' drooping care;
 Thou strings the nerves o' labor sair,
 At's weary toil;
 Thou brightens even dark despair
 Wi' gloomy smile.

"Aft, clad in massy siller weed,
 Wi' gentles thou erects thy head;
 Yet humbly kind in time o' need,
 The poor man's wine;
 His wee drap parritch, or his bread,
 Thou kitchens fine."

Gilbert, in h's excellent vindication of his brother's character, tells us that at the time when many of those "Rhapsodies respecting drinking" were composed and first published, few people were less addicted to drinking than he; and that he assumed a poetical character, very different from that of the man at the time. It has been said that Scotsmen have no humor—no perception of humor—that we are all plain matter-of-fact people—not without some strength of understanding—but grave to a degree on occasions when races more favor'd by nature are gladsome to an excess: and—

"In gay delirium rob them of themselves."

This judgment on our national characteristics implies a familiar acquaintance with Scottish poetry from Dunbar to Burns. It would be nearer the truth—though still wide of it—to affirm, that we have more humor than all the rest of the inhabitants of this earth besides; but this at least is true, that unfortunately for ourselves, we have too much humor, and that it has sometimes been allowed to flow out of its proper province, and mingle itself with thoughts and things that ought for ever to be kept sacred in the minds of the people. A few words by and by on this sub-

ject ; meanwhile, with respect to his " Rhapsodies about Drinking," Burns knew that not only had all the states, stages, and phases of inebriety been humorously illustrated by the comic genius of his country's most popular poets, but that the people themselves, in spite of their deep moral and religious conviction of the sinfulness of intemperance, were prone to look on its indulgences in every droll and ludicrous aspect they could assume, according to the infinite variety of the modifications of individual character. As a poet dealing with life as it lay before and around him, so far from seeking to avoid, he eagerly seized on these ; and having in the constitution of his own being as much humor and as rich as ever mixed with the higher elements of genius, he sometimes gave vent to its perceptions and emotions in strains perfectly irresistible—even to the most serious—who had to force themselves back into their habitual and better state, before they could regard them with due condemnation.

But humor in men of genius is always allied to pathos—its exquisite touches

" On the pale cheek of sorrow awaken a smile,
And illumine the eye that was dim with a tear. "

So is it a thousand times with the humor of Burns—and we have seen it so in our quotations from these very " Rhapsodies." He could sit with " rattling roarin' Willie"—and when he belonged to the Crochallan Fencibles, " he was the king of a' the core." But where he usually sat up late at night, during those glorious hard-working years, was a low loft above a stable—so low that he had to stoop even when he was sitting at a deal table three feet by two—with his " heart inditing a good matter" to a plough-boy, who *read it up* to the poet before they lay down on the same truckle-bed.

Burns had as deep an insight as ever man had into the moral evils of the poor man's character, condition, and life. From many of them he remained free to the last ; some he suffered late and early. What were his struggles we know, yet we know but in part, before he was overcome. But it does not appear that he thought intemperance the worst moral evil of the people,

or that to the habits it forms had chiefly to be imputed their falling short or away from that character enjoined by the law written and unwritten, and without which, preserved in its great lineaments, there cannot be to the poor man, any more than the rich, either power or peace. He believed that but for "Man's inhumanity to man," this might be a much better earth; that they who live by the sweat of their brows would wipe them with pride, so that the blood did but freely circulate from their hearts; that creatures endowed with a moral sense and discourse of reason would follow their dictates, in preference to all solicitations to enjoyment from those sources that flow to them in common with all things that have life, so that they were but allowed the rights and privileges of nature, and not made to bow down to a servitude inexorable as necessity, but imposed, as he thought, on their necks as a yoke by the very hands which Providence had kept free;—believing all this, and nevertheless knowing and feeling, often in bitterness of heart and prostration of spirit, that there is far worse evil, because self-originating and self-inhabiting within the invisible world of every human soul, Burns had no reprobation to inflict on the lighter sins of the oppressed, in sight of the heavier ones of the oppressor; and when he did look into his own heart and the hearts of his brethren in toil and in trouble, for those springs of misery which are for ever welling there, and need no external blasts or torrents to lift them from their beds till they overflow their banks, and inundate ruinously life's securest pastures, he saw THE PASSIONS to which are given power and dominion for bliss or for bale—of them in his sweetest, loftiest inspirations, he sung as a poet all he felt as a man; willing to let his fancy in lighter moods dally with inferior things and merry measures—even with the very meat and drink that sustains man who is but grass, and like the flower of the field flourisheth and is cut down, and raked away out of the sunshine into the shadow of the grave.

That Burns did not only not set himself to dissuade poor people from drinking, but that he indited "Rhapsodies" about "Scotch Drink," and "Earnest Cries," will not, then, seem at all surprising to poor people themselves, nor very culpable even in the eyes of the most sober among them; whatever may be the light

in which some people regard such delinquencies, your more-in-sorrow-than-anger moralists, who are their own butlers, and sleep with the key of the wine-cellar under their pillow; his poetry is very dear to the people, and we venture to say that they understand its spirit as well as the best of those for whom it was not written; for written it was for his own Order—the enlightened majority of Christian men. No fear of their being blind to its venial faults, its more serious imperfections, and if there they be, its sins. There are austere eyes in work-shops, and in the fields, intolerant of pollution; stern judges of themselves and others preside in those courts of conscience that are not open to the public; nevertheless, they have tender hearts, and they yearn with exceeding love towards those of their brethren who have brightened or elevated their common lot. Latent virtues in such poetry as Burns's are continually revealing themselves to readers, whose condition is felt to be uncertain, and their happiness to fluctuate with it; adversity puts to the test our opinions and beliefs, equally with our habits and our practices; and the most moral and religious man that ever worked from morning to night, that his family might have bread—daily from youth upwards till now he is threescore and ten—might approve of the sentiment of that Song, feel it in all its fervor, and express it in all its glee, in which age meeting with age, and again hand and heart linked together, the “trusty feres,” bring back the past in a sun-burst on the present, and thoughtless of the future, pour out unblamed libations to the days “o’ auld lang syne!”

It seems to us very doubtful if any poetry could become popular, of which the prevalent spirit is not in accordance with that of the people, as well in those qualities we grieve to call vices, as in those we are happy to pronounce virtues. It is not sufficient that they be moved for a time against their will, by some moral poet desirous, we shall suppose, of purifying and elevating their character, by the circulation of better sentiments than those with which they have been long familiar; it is necessary that the will shall go along with their sympathies to preserve them perhaps from being turned into antipathies; and that is not likely to happen, if violence be done to long-established customs

and habits, which may have acquired not only the force, but something too of the sanctity, of nature.

But it is certain that to effect any happy change in the manners or the morals of a people—to be in any degree instrumental to the attainment or preservation of their dearest interests—a Poet must deal with them in the spirit of truth ; and that he may do so, he must not only be conversant with their condition, but wise in knowledge, that he may understand what he sees, and whence it springs—the evil and the good. Without it, he can never help to remove a curse or establish a blessing ; for a while his denunciations or his praises may seem to be working wonders—his genius may be extolled to the skies—and himself ranked among the benefactors of his people ; but yet a little while, and it is seen that the miracle has not been wrought, the evil spirit has not been exorcised ; the plague-spot is still on the bosom of his unhealed country ; and the physician sinks away unobserved among men who have not taken a degree.

Look, for example, at the fate of that once fashionable, for we can hardly call it popular, tale—"Scotland's Skaith, or the History of Will and Jean," with its Supplement, "The Waes o' War." Hector Macneil had taste and feeling—even genius—and will be remembered among Scottish poets.

"Robin Burns, in mony a ditty,
Loudly sings in whisky's praise ;
Sweet his sang ! the mair's the pity
E'er on it he war'd sic lays.

"O' a' the ills poor Caledonia
E'er yet pree'd, or e'er will taste,
Brew'd in hell's black Pandemonia—
Whisky's ill will skaith her maist."

So said Hector Macneil of Robert Burns, in verse not quite so vigorous as the "Earnest Cry." It would require a deeper voice to frighten the "drouthy" from "Scotch Drink," if it be "brewed in hell." "Impressed with the baneful consequences inseparable from an inordinate use of ardent spirits among the lower orders of society, and anxious to contribute something that might at least tend to retard the contagion of so

dangerous an evil, it was conceived, in the ardor of philanthropy, that a natural, pathetic story, in verse, calculated to enforce moral truths, in the language of simplicity and passion, might probably interest the uncorrupted ; and that a striking picture of the calamities incident to idle debauchery, contrasted with the blessings of industrious prosperity, might (although insufficient to reclaim abandoned vice) do something to strengthen and encourage endangered virtue. Visionary as these fond expectations may have been, it is pleasing to cherish the idea ; and if we may be allowed to draw favorable inferences from the sale *of ten thousand copies in the short space of five months*, why should we despair of success ?” The success, if we may trust to statistical tables, has, alas ! been small ; nor would it have been greater had a million copies been put into circulation. For the argument illustrated in the “History of Will and Jean” has no foundation in nature—and proceeds on an assumption grossly calumnious of the Scottish character. The following verses used once to ring in every ear :—

“ Wha was ance like Willie Garlace,
Wha in neiboring town or farm ?
Beauty’s bloom shone in his fair face,
Deadly strength was in his arm ?

“ Wha wi’ Will could rin, or wrestle,
Throw the sledge, or toss the bar ?
Hap what would, he stood a castle,
Or for safety or for war :

“ Warm his heart, and mild as manfu’,
Wi’ the bauld he bauld wad be ;
But to friends he had a handfu’,
Purse and service aft were free.”

He marries Jeanie Millar, a wife worthy of him, and for three years they are good and happy in the blessing of God. What in a few months makes drunkards of them both ? He happens to go *once* for refreshment, after a long walk, into a way-side public house—and from that night he is a lost man. He is described as entering it on his way home from a Fair—and we never heard of a Fair where there was no whisky—drinks

Meg's ale or porter, and eats her bread and cheese without incurring much blame from his biographer; but his companion prevails on him to taste "the widow's gill"—a thing this bold peasant seems never before to have heard of—and infatuated with the novel potion, Willie Garlace, after a few feeble struggles, in which he derives no support from his previous life of happiness, industry, sobriety, virtue, and religion, staggers to destruction. Jeanie, in despair, takes to drinking too; they are "rouped out;" she becomes a beggar, and he "a sodger." The verses run smoothly and rapidly, and there is both skill and power of narration, nor are touches of nature wanting, strokes of pathos that have drawn tears. But by what insidious witchcraft this frightful and fatal transformation was brought about, the uninspired story-teller gives no intimation—a few vulgar common-places constitute the whole of his philosophy—and he no more thinks of tracing the effects of whisky on the moral being—the heart—of poor Willie Garlace, than he would have thought of giving an account of the coats of his stomach, had he been poisoned to death by arsenic. "His hero" is not gradually changed into a beast, like the victims of Circe's enchantments; but rather resembles the Cyclops all at once maddened in his cave by the craft of Ulysses. This is an outrage against nature; not thus is the sting to be taken out of "Scotland's Scaith"—and a nation of drunkards to be changed into a nation of gentlemen. If no man be for a moment safe who "prees the widow's gill" the case is hopeless, and despair admits the inutility of Excise. In the "Waes o' War"—the Sequel of the story—Willie returns to Scotland with a pension and a wooden leg, and finds Jeanie with the children in a cottage given her by "the good Buccleugh." Both have become as sober as church-mice. The loss of a limb, and eight pounds a year for life, had effectually reformed the husband, a cottage and one pound a quarter the wife; and *this* was good Hector Macneil's idea of a Moral Poem! A poem that was not absolutely to stay the plague, but to fortify the constitution against it; "and if we may be allowed to draw favorable inferences from the sale of ten thousand copies in the short space of five months, why should we despair of success?"

It is not from such poetry that any healthful influence can be exhaled over the vitiated habits of a people ;

“ With other ministrations, thou, O Nature !
Healest thy wandering and distempered child ; ”

had Burns written a Tale to exemplify a Curse, Nature would have told him of them all ; nor would he have been in aught unfitted by the experiences that prompted many a genial and festive strain, but, on the contrary, the better qualified to give in “ thoughts that breathe and words that burn,” some solution of that appalling mystery, in which the souls of good men are often seen hurrying and hurried along paths they had long abhorred, and still abhor, as may be seen from their eyes, even when they are rejecting all offered means of salvation, human and divine, and have sold their bibles to buy death. Nor would Burns have adopted the vulgar libel on the British army, that it was a receptacle for drunken husbands who had deserted their wives and children. There have been many such recruits ; but his martial, loyal, and patriotic spirit would ill have brooked the thought of such a disgrace to the service, in an ideal picture, which his genius was at liberty to color at its own will, and could have colored brightly according to truth. “ One fine summer evening he was at the Inn at Brownhill with a couple of friends, when a poor way-worn soldier passed the window : of a sudden, it struck the poet to call him in, and get the story of his adventures ; after listening to which, he all at once fell into one of those fits of abstraction, not unusual with him,” and perhaps, with the air of “ *The mill, mill O* ” in his heart, he composed “ *The Soldier’s Return*.” It, too, speaks of the “ waes of war ; ” and that poor way-worn soldier, we can well believe, had given no very flattering account of himself or his life, either before or after he had mounted the cockade. Why had he left Scotland and Mill-mannoch on the sweet banks of the Coyle near Coylton Kirk ? Burns cared not why ; he loved his kind, and above all, his own people ; and his imagination immediately pictured a blissful meeting of long-parted lovers.

“ I left the lines and tented field,
Where lang I’d been a lodger,

My humble knapsack a' my wealth,
A poor but honest sodger.

“A right leal heart was in my breast,
A hand unstained wi' plunder,
And for fair Scotia hame again,
I cheery on did wander.
I thought upon the banks o' Coil,
I thought upon my Nancy,
I thought upon the witching smile,
That caught my youthful fancy.

“At length I reached the bonnie glen,
Where early life I sported ;
I passed the mill, and trysting thorn,
Where Nancy oft I courted :
Wha spied I but my ain dear maid,
Down by my mother's dwelling !
And turned me round to hide the tear
That in my breast was swelling.”

The ballad is a very beautiful one, and throughout how true to nature ! It is alive all over Scotland ; that other is dead, or with suspended animation ; not because “The Soldier's Return” is a happy, and “Will and Jean” a miserable story ; for the people's heart is prone to pity, though their eyes are not much given to tears. But the people were told that “Will and Jean” had been written for their sakes, by a wise man made melancholy by the sight of their condition. The upper ranks were sorrowful exceedingly for the lower—all weeping over their wine for them over their whisky, and would not be comforted ! For Hector Macneil informs them that

“Maggie's club, wha could get nae light
On some things that should be clear,
Fand ere long the fau't, and ae night
Clubb'd and gat the Gazetteer.”

The lower ranks read the Lamentation, for ever so many thousands were thrust into their hands ; but though not insensible of their own infirmities, and willing to confess them, they rose up in indignation against a charge that swept their firesides of all that was most sacredly cherished there, asked who wrote

"The Cottar's Saturday Night?" and declared with one voice, and a loud one, that if they were to be bettered by poems, it should be by the poems of their own Robert Burns.

And here we are brought to speak of those Satirical compositions which made Burns famous within the bounds of more than one Presbytery, before the world had heard his name. In boyhood and early youth he showed no symptoms of humor—he was no droll—dull even—from constitutional headaches, and heart-ques, and mysteries not to be understood—no laughing face had he—the lovers of mirth saw none of its sparkles in his dark, melancholy looking eyes. In his autobiographical sketch he tells us of no funny or facetious "chap-books;" his earliest reading was of the "tender and the true," the serious or the sublime. But from the first he had been just as susceptible and as observant of the comic as of the tragic—nature had given him a genius as powerful over smiles as tears—but as the sacred source lies deepest, its first inspirations were drawn thence in abstraction and silence, and not till it felt some assurance of its diviner strength did it delight to disport itself among the ludicrous images that, in innumerable varieties of form and color—all representative of realities—may be seen, when we choose to look at them, mingling with the most solemn or pathetic shows that pass along in our dream of life. You remember his words, "Thus with me began Love and Poetry." True; they grew together; but for a long time they were almost silent—seldom broke out into song. His earliest love verses but poorly express his love—nature was then too strong within him for art which then was weak—and young passion, then pure but all-engrossing, was filling his whole soul with poetry that ere long was to find a tongue that would charm the world.

It was in the Humorous, the Comic, the Satirical, that he first tried and proved his strength. Exulting to find that a rush of words was ready at his will—that no sooner flashed his fancies than on the instant they were embodied, he wanton'd and revelled among the subjects that had always seemed to him the most risible, whatever might be the kind of laughter, simple or compound—pure mirth, or a mixture of mirth and contempt, even of indignation and scorn—mirth still being the chief ingredient that

qualified the whole—and these, as you know, were all included within the “Sanctimonious,” from which Burns believed the Sacred to be excluded; but there lay the danger, and there the blame if he transgressed the holy bounds.

His satires were unsparingly directed against certain ministers of the gospel, whose Calvinism he thought was not Christianity; whose characters were to him odious, their persons ridiculous, their manners in the pulpit irreverent, and out of it absurd; and having frequent opportunities of seeing and hearing them in all their glory, he made studies of them *con amore* on the spot, and at home from abundant materials with a master’s hand elaborated finished pictures—for some of them are no less—which, when hung out for public inspection in market-places, brought the originals before crowds of gazers transported into applause. Was this wicked? Wicked we think too strong a word; but we cannot say that it was not reprehensible, for to all sweeping satire there must be some exception—and exaggeration cannot be truth. Burns by his irregularities had incurred ecclesiastical censure, and it has not unfairly been said that personal spite barbed the sting of his satire. Yet we fear such censure had been but too lightly regarded by him; and we are disposed to think that his ridicule, however blameable on other grounds, was free from malignity, and that his genius for the comic rioted in the pleasure of sympathy and the pride of power. To those who regard the persons he thus satirized as truly belonging to the old Covenanters, and Saints of a more ancient time, such satires must seem shameful and sinful; to us who regard “Rumble John” and his brethren in no such light, they appear venial offences, and not so horrible as Hudibrastic. A good many years after Burns’s death, in our boyhood we sometimes saw and heard more than one of those worthies, and cannot think his descriptions greatly overcharged. We remember walking one day—unknown to us as a fast day—in the neighborhood of an ancient fortress, and hearing a noise to be likened to nothing imaginable on this earth but the bellowing of a buffalo fallen into a trap upon a tiger, which as we came within half a mile of the castle we discerned to be the voice of a pastor engaged in public prayer. His physiognomy was little less alarming than his voice, and his

sermon corresponded with his looks and his lungs—the whole being indeed an extraordinary exhibition of divine worship. We never can think it sinful that Burns should have been humorous on such a pulpiteer; and if we shudder at some of the verses in which he seems yet alive, it is not at the satirist.

“From this time, I began to be known in the country as a maker of rhymes. *Holy Willie's Prayer* next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, and see if any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers;” “and to a place among *profane rhymers*,” says Mr. Lockhart, in his masterly volume, “the author of this *terrible infliction* had unquestionably established his right.” Sir Walter speaks of it as “a piece of satire *more exquisitely severe* than any which Burns ever afterwards wrote, *but unfortunately cast in a form too daringly profane* to be received into Dr. Currie's collection.” We have no wish to say one word in opposition to the sentence pronounced by such judges; but has Burns here *dared* beyond Milton, Goethe, and Byron? He puts a Prayer to the Almighty into the mouth of one whom he believes to be one of the lowest of blasphemers. In that Prayer are impious supplications couched in shocking terms, characteristic of the hypocrite who stands on a familiar footing with his Maker. Milton's blasphemer is a fallen angel, Goethe's a devil, Byron's the first murderer, and Burns's an elder of the kirk. All the four poets are alike guilty, or not guilty—unless there be in the case of one of them something peculiar that lifts him up above the rest, in the case of another something peculiar that leaves him alone a sinner. Let Milton then stand aloof, acquitted of the charge, not because of the grandeur and magnificence of his conception of Satan, but because its high significance cannot be misunderstood by the pious, and that out of the mouths of the dwellers in darkness, as well as of the Sons of the Morning “he vindicates the ways of God to man.” Byron's Cain blasphemes; does Byron? Many have thought so—for they saw, or seemed to see, in the character of the Cursed, as it glooms in soliloquies that are poetically sublime, some dark intention in its delineator to inspire doubts of the justice of the Almighty One who inhabiteth eternity. Goethe in

the "Prologue in Heaven" brings Mephistopheles face to face with God. But Goethe devoted many years to "his great poem, Faust," and in it he too, as many of the wise and good believe, strove to show rising out of the blackness of darkness the attributes of Him whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity. Be it even so; then, why blame Burns? You cannot justly do so, on account of the "daringly profane form" in which "Holy Willie's Prayer" is cast, without utterly reprobating the "Prologue in Heaven."

Of the *Holy Fair* few have spoken with any serious reprehension. Dr. Blair was so much taken with it that he suggested a well known emendation—and for our own part we have no hesitation in saying, that we see no reason to lament that it should have been written by the writer of the *Cottar's Saturday Night*. The title of the poem was no profane thought of his—it had arisen long before among the people themselves, and expressed the prevalent opinion respecting the use and wont that profaned the solemnization of the most awful of all religious rites. In many places, and in none more than in Mauchline, the administration of the Sacrament was hedged round about by the self-same practices that mark the character and make the enjoyment of a Rural Fair-day. Nobody doubts that in the midst of them all sat hundreds of pious people whose whole hearts and souls were in the divine service. Nobody doubts that even among those who took part in the open or hardly concealed indecencies which custom could never make harmless, though it made many insensible to their grossness, not a few were now and then visited with devout thoughts; nay, that some, in spite of their improprieties, which fell off from them unawares, or were by an act of pious volition dismissed, were privileged to partake of the communion elements. Nobody supposes that the heart of such an assemblage was to be judged from its outside—that there was no composed depth beneath that restless surface. But everybody knows that there was fatal desecration of the spirit that should have reigned there, and that the thoughts of this world were paramount at a time and place set apart, under sanctions and denunciations the most awful, to the remembrance of Him who purchased for us the kingdom of Heaven.

We believe, then, that Burns was not guilty in this poem of any intentional irreverence toward the public ordinances of religion. It does not, in our opinion, afford any reason for supposing that he was among the number of those who regard such ordinances as of little or no avail, because they do not always exemplify the reverence which becomes men in the act of communing with their God. Such is the constitution of human nature that there are too many moments in the very article of these solemn occasions when the hearts of men are a prey to all their wonted cares and follies; and this short-coming in the whole solemnity robs it to many a delicate and well-disposed, but not thoroughly instructed imagination, of all attraction. But there must be a worship by communities as well as by individuals; for in the regards of Providence, communities appear to have a personality as well as individuals; and how shall the worship of communities be conducted, but by forms and ceremonies, which as they occur at stated times, whatever be the present frame of men's minds, must be often gone through with coldness. If those persons would duly consider the necessity of such ordinances, and their use in the conservation of religion, they would hold them sacred, in spite of the levity and hypocrisy that too often accompany their observance, nor would they wonder to see among the worshippers an unsuspected attention to the things of this world. But there was far more than this in the desecration which called for "the Holy Fair" from Burns. A divine ordinance had through unhallowed custom been overlaid by abuses, if not to the extinction, assuredly to the suppression, in numerous communicants, of the religious spirit essential to its efficacy; and in that fact we have to look for a defence of the audacity of his sarcasm; we are to believe that the Poet felt strong in the possession of a reverence far greater than that which he beheld, and in the conviction that nothing which he treated with levity could be otherwise than displeasing in the eye of God. We are far from seeking to place him, on this occasion, by the side of those men who, "strong in hatred of idolatry," become religious reformers, and while purifying Faith, unsparingly shattered Forms, not without violence to the cherished emotions of many pious hearts. Yet their wit too was often

aimed at faulty things standing in close connection with solemnities which wit cannot approach without danger. Could such scenes as those against which Burns directed the battery of his ridicule be *endured now*? Would they not be felt to be most *profane*? And may we not attribute the change in some measure to the Comic Muse?

Burns did not need to have subjects for poetry pointed out and enumerated to him, latent or patent in Scottish Life, as was considerably done in a series of dullish verses by that excellent person, Mr. Telford, Civil Engineer. Why, it has been asked, did he not compose a Sacred Poem on the administration of the Sacrament of our Lord's Last Supper? The answer is—how could he with such scenes before his eyes? Was he to shut them, and to describe it as if such scenes were not? Was he to introduce them, and give us a poem of a mixed kind, faithful to the truth? From such profanation his genius was guarded by his sense of religion, which though defective was fervent, and not unaccompanied with awe. Observe in what he has written, how he keeps aloof from the Communion Table. Not for one moment does he in thought enter the doors of the House of God. There is a total separation between the outer scene and the inner sanctuary—the administration of the sacrament is removed out of all those desecrating circumstances, and left to the imagination of the religious mind—by his silence. Would a great painter have dared to give us a picture of it? Harvey has painted, simply and sublimely, a “Hill Sacrament.” But there all is solemn in the light of expiring day; the peace that passeth all understanding reposes on the heads of all the communicants; and in a spot sheltered from the persecutor by the solitude of sympathizing nature, the humble and the contrite, in a ritual hallowed by their pious forefathers, draw near at his bidding to their Redeemer.

We must now return to Burns himself, but cannot allow him to leave Ellisland without dwelling for a little while longer on the happy life he led for three years and more on that pleasant farm. Now and then you hear him low-spirited in his letters, but generally cheerful; and though his affairs were not very prosperous, there was comfort in his household. There was

peace and plenty ; for Mrs. Burns was a good manager, and he was not a bad one ; and one way and another the family enjoyed an honest livelihood. The house had been decently furnished, the farm well stocked ; and they wanted nothing to satisfy their sober wishes. Three years after marriage, Burns, with his Jean at his side, writes to Mrs. Dunlap, "as fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever ; rustic, native grace ; unaffected modesty, and unsullied purity ; nature's mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste ; a simplicity of soul, unsuspecting of, because unacquainted with, the ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world ; and the dearest charm of all the rest, a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return ; these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution, which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life." Josiah Walker, however, writing many years after, expresses his belief that Burns did not love his wife. "A discerning reader will perceive," says he, "that the letters in which he announces his marriage are written in that state, when the mind is pained by reflecting on an unwelcome step ; and finds relief to itself in seeking arguments to justify the deed, and lessen its disadvantages in the opinion of others. But the greater the change which the taste of Burns had undergone, and the more his hopes of pleasure must in consequence have been diminished, from rendering Miss Armour his only female companion, the more credit does he deserve for that rectitude of resolution, which prompted him to fulfil what he considered as an engagement, and to act as a necessary duty prescribed. We may be at the same time permitted to lament the necessity which he had thus incurred. A marriage, from a sentiment of duty, may by circumstances be rendered indispensable ; but as it is undeniably a duty, not to be accomplished by any temporary exertion, however great, but calling for a renewal of effort every year, every day, and every hour, it is putting the strength and constancy of our principles to the most severe and hazardous trial. Had Burns completed his marriage, before perceiving the interest which he had the power of creating in females, whose accomplishments of mind and manners

Jean could never hope to equal ; or had his duty and his pride permitted his alliance with one of that superior class, many of his subsequent deviations from sobriety and happiness might probably have been prevented. It was no fault of Mrs. Burns, that she was unable, from her education, to furnish what had grown, since the period of their first acquaintance, one of the poet's most exquisite enjoyments ; and if a daily vacuity of interest at home exhausted his patience, and led him abroad in quest of exercise for the activity of his mind, those who can place themselves in a similar situation will not be inclined to judge too severely of his error." Mrs. Burns, you know, was alive when this philosophical stuff was published, and she lived for more than twenty years after it, as exemplary a widow as ever had been a wife. Its gross indelicacy—say rather wanton assault to all the feelings of a woman, is abhorrent to all the feelings of a man and shows the monk. And we have quoted it now that you may see what vile liberties respectable libellers were long wont to take with Burns and all that belonged to him—because he was a Gauger. Who would have dared to write thus of the wife and widow of a—*Gentleman*—of one who was a *Lady* ? Not Josiah Walker. Yet it passed for years unproved—the “*Life*” which contains it still circulates, and seems to be in some repute—and Josiah Walker on another occasion is cited to the rescue by George Thomson as a champion and vindicator of the truth. The insolent eulogist dared to say that Robert Burns in marrying Jean Armour, “repaired seduction by the most precious sacrifice, short of life, which one human being can make to another !” To her, in express terms, he attributes her husband's misfortunes and misdoings—to her who soothed his sorrows, forgave his sins, inspired his songs, cheered his hearth, blest his bed, educated his children, revered his memory, and held sacred his dust.

What do you think was, according to his biographer, the chief cause of the blameable life Burns led at Ellisland ? *He knew not what to do with himself !* “When not occupied in the fields, his time must have hung heavy on his hands !” Just picture to yourself Burns peevishly pacing the “half-parlor half-kitchen” floor, with his hands in his breeches pockets, tormenting his dull

brain to invent some employment by which he might be enabled to resist the temptation of going to bed in the forenoon in his clothes! But how is this? "When not occupied in the fields, his time must have hung heavy on his hands; *for we are not to infer*, from the literary eminence of Burns, that, like a person regularly trained to studious habits, he could render himself by study independent of society. *He could read and write* when occasion prompted; but he could not, like a professional scholar, become so interested in a daily course of lettered industry, as to find company an interruption rather than a relief."

We cheerfully admit that Burns was not engaged at Ellisland on a History of the World. He had not sufficient books. Besides, he had to ride, in good smuggling weather, two hundred miles a-week. But we cannot admit that "to banish dejection, and to fill his vacant hours, it is not surprising that he should have resorted to such associates as his new neighborhood, or the inns upon the road to Ayrshire, could afford; and if these happened to be of a low description, that his constant ambition to render himself an important and interesting figure in every society, made him suit his conduct and conversation to their taste." When not on duty, the Exciseman was to be found at home like other farmers, and when "not occupied in the fields" with farm-work, he might be seen playing with Sir William Wallace and other Scotch heroes in miniature, two or three pet sheep of the quadruped breed ranging in the vagaries of the bipeds; or striding along the Scaur with his Whangee rod in his fist, with which, had time hung heavy on his hands, he would have cracked the skull of old Chronos; or sitting on a divot-dyke with the ghost of Tam O' Shanter, Captain Henderson, and the Earl of Glencairn; or, so it is recorded, "on a rock projecting into the Nith (which we have looked for in vain) employed in angling, with a cap made of a fox's skin on his head, a loose great-coat fixed round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broadsword;" or with his legs under the fir, with the famous Black Bowl sending up a Scotch mist in which were visible the wigs of two orthodox English clergymen, "to whose tastes his constant ambition to render himself an important and interesting figure in every society, made him suit his conduct

and conversation ;"—in such situations might Josiah Walker have stumbled upon Burns, and perhaps met with his own friend, "a clergyman from the south of England, who, on his return, talked with rapture of his reception, and of all that he had seen and heard in the cottage of Ellisland," or with Ramsay of Oughtertyre, who was delighted "with Burns's *uxor Sabina qualis* and the poet's modest mansion, so unlike the habitations of ordinary rustics," the very evening the Bard suddenly bounced in upon us, and said as he entered, "I come, to use the words of Shakspeare, '*stewed in haste*,'" and in a little while, such was the force and versatility of his genius, he made the tears run down Mr. L——'s cheeks, albeit "unused to the poetic strain ;"—or who knows but the pedestrian might have found the poet engaged in religious exercises under the sylvan shade ? For did he not write to Mrs. Dunlop, "I own myself so little of a presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habitual routine of life and thought which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery. This day (New-Year-day morning), the first Sunday of May, a breezy blue-skyed noon, some time before the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end of autumn ; these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday." Finally, Josiah might have made his salaam to the Exciseman just as he was folding up that letter in which he says, "we know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices or whims, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing or struck with that, which, in minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favorite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain daisy, the harebell, the foxglove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers, in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can all this be

owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the *Æolian* harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man’s immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or wo beyond death and the grave.”

Burns however found that an active gauger, with ten parishes to look after, could not be a successful farmer; and looking forward to promotion in the Excise, he gave up his lease, and on his appointment to another district removed into Dumfries. The greater part of his small capital had been sunk or scattered on the somewhat stony soil of Ellisland; but with his library and furniture—his wife and his children—his and their wearing apparel—a trifle in ready money—no debt—youth, health, and hope, and a salary of seventy pounds, he did not think himself poor. Such provision, he said, was luxury to what either he or his better-half had been born to—and the flitting from Ellisland, accompanied as it was with the regrets and respect of the neighborhood, displayed on the whole a cheerful cavalcade.

It is remarked by Mr. Lockhart that Burns’s “four principal biographers, Heron, Currie, Walker and Irving, concur in the general statement that his moral course, from the time that he settled in Dumfries, was downwards.” Mr. Lockhart has shown that they have one and all committed many serious errors in this “general statement,” and we too shall examine it before we conclude. Meanwhile let us direct our attention, not to his “moral course,” but to the course of his genius. It continued to burn bright as ever, and if the character of the man corresponded in its main features with that of the poet, which we believe it did, its best vindication will be found in a right understanding of the spirit that animated his genius to the last, and gave birth to perhaps its finest effusions—HIS MATCHLESS SONGS.

In his earliest Journal, we find this beautiful passage:—

“There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness, in some of our ancient ballads, which show them to be the work of a masterly hand: and it has often given me many a heart-ache to reflect, that such glorious old bards—bards who very proba-

bly owed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love, with such fine strokes of nature—that their very names (O how mortifying to a bard's vanity !) are now 'buried among the wreck of things which were.' O ye illustrious names unknown ! who could feel so strongly and describe so well ; the last, the meanest of the Muse's train—one who, though far inferior to your flights, yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you—a poor rustic bard, unknown, pays this sympathetic pang to your memory ! Some of you tell us, with all the charms of verse, that you have been unfortunate in the world—unfortunate in love ; he too has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and, worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored. Like you, all his consolation was his muse. She taught him in rustic measures to complain. Happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination and flow of verse ! May the turf lie lightly on your bones ! and may you now enjoy that solace and rest which this world rarely gives to the heart tuned to all the feelings of poesy and love."

The old nameless song-writers, buried centuries ago in the kirk-yards that have themselves perhaps ceased to exist—yet one sees sometimes lonesome burial-places among the hills, where man's dust continues to be deposited after the house of God has been removed elsewhere—the old nameless song-writers took hold out of their stored hearts of some single thought or remembrance surpassingly sweet at the moment over all others, and instantly words as sweet had being, and breathed themselves forth along with some accordant melody of the still more olden time ;—or when musical and poetical genius happily met together, both alike passion-inspired, then was born another new tune or air soon treasured within a thousand maidens' hearts, and soon flowing from lips that "murmured near the living brooks a music sweeter than their own." Had boy or virgin faded away in untimely death, and the green mound that covered them, by the working of some secret power far within the heart, suddenly risen to fancy's eye, and then as suddenly sunk away into oblivion with all the wavering burial-place ? Then was

framed dirge, hymn, elegy, that long after the mourned and the mourner were forgotten, continued to wail and lament up and down all the vales of Scotland—for what vale is unvisited by sorrow—in one same monotonous melancholy air, varied only as each separate singer had her heart touched, and her face saddened, with a fainter or stronger shade of pity or grief! Had some great battle been lost and won, and to the shepherd on the braes had a faint and far-off sound seemed on a sudden to touch the horizon like the echo of a trumpet? Then had some ballad its birth, heroic yet with dying falls, for the singer wept, even as his heart burned within him, over the princely head prostrated with all its plumes, haply near the lowly woodsman, whose horn had often startled the deer as together they trode the forest-chase, lying humble in death by his young lord's feet!—O, blue-eyed maiden, even more beloved than beautiful! how couldst thou ever find heart to desert thy minstrel, who for thy sake would have died without one sigh given to the disappearing happiness of sky and earth—and, witched by some evil spell, how couldst thou follow an outlaw to foreign lands, to find, alas! some day a burial in the great deep? Thus was enchained in sounds the complaint of disappointed, defrauded, and despairing passion, and another air filled the eyes of our Scottish maidens with a new luxury of tears—a low flat tune, surcharged throughout with one groan-like sigh, and acknowledged, even by the gayest heart, to be indeed the language of an incurable grief!—Or flashed the lover's raptured hour across the brain—yet an hour, in all its rapture, calm as the summer sea—or the level summit of a far flushing forest asleep in sunshine, when there is not a breath in heaven? Then thoughts that breathe, and words that burn—and, in that wedded verse and music you feel that “love is heaven, and heaven is love!” But affection, sober, sedate, and solemn, has its sudden and strong inspirations; sudden and strong as those of the wildest and most fiery passion. Hence the old grey-haired poet and musician, sitting haply blind in shade or sunshine, and bethinking him of the days of his youth, while the leading hand of his aged Alice gently touches his arm, and that voice of hers that once lilted like the linnet, is now like that of the dove in its

lonely tree, mourns not for the past, but gladdens in the present, and sings a holy song—like one of the songs of Zion—for both trust that, ere the sun brings another summer, their feet will be wandering by the waters of eternal life.

Thus haply might arise verse and air of Scotland's old pathetic melodies. And how her light and airy measures?

Streaks of sunshine come dancing down from heaven on the darkest days to bless and beautify the life of poverty dwelling in the wilderness. Labor, as he goes forth at morn from his rustic lodge, feels, to the small bird's twitter, his whole being filled with joy; and, as he quickens his pace to field or wood, breaks into a song. Care is not always his black companion, but oft, at evening hour—while innocence lingers half-afraid behind, yet still follows with thoughtful footsteps—Mirth leads him to the circular seat beneath the tree, among whose exterior branches swings, creaking to and fro in the wind, the signboard teaching friendship by the close grasp of two emblematical hands. And thence the catch and troll, while "laughter holding both his sides" sheds tears to song and ballad pathetic on the woes of married life, and all the ills that "our flesh is heir to."—Fair, Rocking, and Harvest-home, and a hundred rural festivals, are for ever giving wings to the flight of the circling year; or how could this lazy earth ever in so short a time whirl, spinning asleep on her axis, round that most attractive but distant sun? How loud, broad, deep, soul-and-body-shaking is the ploughman's or the shepherd's mirth, as a hundred bold sun-burnt visages make the rafters of the old hostel ring! Overhead the thunder of the time-keeping dance, and all the joyous tene-ment alive with love! The pathetic song, by genius steeped in tears, is forgotten; roars of boorish laughter reward the fearless singer for the ballad that brings burning blushes on every female face, till the snooded head can scarcely be lifted up again to meet the free kiss of affection bold in the privileges of the festival, where bashfulness is out of season, and the chariest maid withholds not the harmless boon only half granted beneath the milk-white thorn. It seems as if all the profounder interests of life were destroyed, or had never existed. In moods like these, genius plays with grief, and sports with sorrow. Broad farce

shakes hands with deep tragedy. Vice seems almost to be virtue's sister. The names and the natures of things are changed, and all that is most holy, and most holily cherished by us strange mortal creatures—for which thousands of men and women have died at the stake, and would die again rather than forfeit it—virgin love, and nuptial faith, and religion itself that saves us from being but as the beasts that perish, and equalizes us with the angels that live for ever—all become for a time seeming objects of scoff, derision, and merriment. But it is not so, as God is in heaven it is not so; there has been a flutter of strange dancing lights on life's surface, but that is all, its depths have remained undisturbed in the poor man's nature; and how deep these are you may easily know by looking, in an hour or two, through that small shining pane, the only one in the hut, and beholding and hearing him, his wife and children, on their knees in prayer—(how beautiful in devotion that same maiden now!) not unseen by the eye of Him who, sitting in the heaven of heavens, doth make our earth his footstool.

And thus the many broad-mirth songs, and tales, and ballads arose, that enliven Scotland's antique minstrelsy.

To Burns's ear all these lowly lays were familiar, and most dear were they all to his heart: nor less so the airs in which they have as it were been so long embalmed, and will be imperishable, unless some fatal change should ever be wrought in the manners of our people. From the first hour, and indeed long before it, that he composed his rudest verse, often had he sung aloud "old songs that are the music of the heart;" and some day or other to be able himself to breathe such strains, had been his dearest, his highest ambition. His "genius and his moral frame" were thus imbued with the spirit of our old traditionary ballad poetry; and as soon as all his manifold passions were ripe, and his whole glorious being in full maturity, the voice of song was on all occasions of deepest and tenderest human interest, the voice of his daily, his nightly speech. He wooed each maiden in song that will, as long as our Doric dialect is breathed by love in beauty's ears, be murmured close to the cheek of Innocence trembling in the arms of Passion. It was in some such dream of delight that, wandering all by himself to seek the

muse by some "trotting burn's meander," he found his face breathed upon by the wind, as it was turned toward the region of the setting sun; and in a moment it was as the pure breath of his beloved, and he exclaimed to the conscious stars,

"Of a' the airts the wind can blaw,
I dearly like the west;
For there the bonny lassie lives,
The lass that I lo'e best!"

How different, yet how congenial to that other strain, which ends like the last sound of a funeral bell, when the aged have been buried:

"We'll sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my joe!"

These old songs were his models, because they were models of certain forms of feeling having a necessary and eternal existence. Feel as those who breathed them felt, and if you utter your feelings, the utterance is song. Burns did feel as they felt, and looked with the same eyes on the same objects. So entirely was their language his language, that all the beautiful lines, and half lines, and single words, that, because of something in them more exquisitely true to nature, had survived all the rest of the compositions to which they had long ago belonged, were sometimes adopted by him, almost unconsciously it might seem, in his finest inspirations; and oftener still sounded in his ear like a key-note, on which he pitched his own plaintive tune of the heart, till the voice and language of the old and new days were but as one; and the maiden who sung to herself the song by her wheel, or on the brae, quite lost in a wavering world of phantasy, could not, as she smiled, choose but also weep!

So far from detracting from the originality of his lyrics, this impulse to composition greatly increased it, while it gave to them a more touching character than perhaps ever could have belonged to them, had they not breathed at all of antiquity. Old but not obsolete, a word familiar to the lips of human beings who lived ages ago, but tinged with a slight shade of strangeness as

it flows from our own, connects the speaker, or the singer, in a way, though "mournful, yet pleasant to the soul," with past generations, and awakens a love at once more tender and more imaginative towards "auld Scotland." We think, even at times when thus excited, of other Burns who died without their fame; and, glorying in him and his name, we love his poetry the more deeply for the sake of him whose genius has given our native land a new title of honor among the nations. Assuredly Burns is felt to be a Scotchman *intus et in cute* in all his poetry; but not more even in his "Tam o'Shanter" and "Cottar's Saturday night," his two longest and most elaborate compositions, than in one and all of his innumerable and inimitable songs, from "Daintie Davie," to "Thou lingering star." We know too that the composition of songs was to him a perfect happiness that continued to the close of life—an inspiration that shot its light and heat, it may be said, within the very borders of his grave.

In his "Common-place or Scrap Book, begun in April, 1783," there are many fine reflections on Song-writing, besides that exquisite invocation—showing how early Burns had studied it as an art. We have often heard some of his popular songs found fault with for their imperfect rhymes—so imperfect, indeed, as not to be called rhymes at all; and we acknowledge that we remember the time when we used reluctantly to yield a dissatisfied assent to such objections. Thus in "Highland Mary"—an impassioned strain of eight quatrains—strictly speaking there are no rhymes—*Montgomery, drumlie; tarry, Mary; blossom, bosom; dearie, Mary; tender, asunder; early, Mary; fondly, kindly; dearly, Mary.* It is not enough to say that here, and in other instances, Burns was imitating the manner of some of the old songs—indulging in the same license; for he would not have done so, had he thought it an imperfection. He felt that there must be a reason in nature why this was sometimes so pleasing—why it sometimes gave a grace beyond the reach of art. Those minnesingers had all musical ears, and were right in believing them. Their ears told them that such words as these—meeting on their tympana under the modifying influence of tune, were virtually rhymes; and as such they "slid into

their souls." "There is," says Burns in a passage unaccountably omitted by Currie, and first given by Cromeek—"a great irregularity in the old Scotch songs—a redundancy of syllables with respect to that exactness of accent and measure that the English poetry requires—but which glides in most melodiously with the respective tunes to which they are set. For instance, the fine old song of *The mill, mill O*—to give it a plain prosaic reading—it halts prodigiously out of measure. On the other hand, the song set to the same tune in Bremner's Collection of Scotch songs, which begins, *To Fanny fair could I impart, &c.*—it is most exact measure; and yet, let them both be sung before a real critic, one above the biases of prejudice, but a thorough judge of nature, how flat and spiritless will the last appear, how trite and lamely methodical, compared with the wild, warbling cadence—the heart-moving melody of the first. This is particularly the case with all those airs which end with a hypermetrical syllable. There is a degree of wild irregularity in many of the compositions and fragments which are daily sung to them by my compeers—the common people—a certain happy arrangement of old Scotch syllables, and yet very frequently nothing—not even *like* rhyme—or sameness of jingle, at the end of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine that perhaps it might be possible for a Scotch poet, with a nice judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favorite airs—particularly the class of them mentioned above—independent of rhyme altogether."

It is a common mistake to suppose that the world is indebted for most of Burns's songs to George Thomson. He contributed to that gentleman sixty original songs, and a noble contribution it was; besides hints, suggestions, emendations, and restorations innumerable; but three times as many were written by him, emended or restored, for Johnson's *SCOTS' MUSICAL MUSEUM*. He began to send songs to Johnson, with whom he had become intimately acquainted on his first visit to Edinburgh, early in 1787, and continued to send them till within a few days of his death. In November, 1788, he says to Johnson, "I can easily see, my dear friend, that you will probably have four volumes. Perhaps you may not find your account lucratively in this business; but you are a patriot for the music of your country, and I

am certain posterity will look on themselves as highly indebted to your public spirit. Be not in a hurry ; let us go on correctly, and your name will be immortal." On the 4th of July, 1796—he died on the 21st—he writes from Dumfries to the worthy music-seller in Edinburgh : "How are you, my dear friend, and how comes on your fifth volume ? You may probably think that for some time past I have neglected you and your work ; but, alas ! the hand of pain, sorrow, and care, has these many months lain heavy on me. Personal and domestic affliction have almost entirely banished that alacrity and life with which I used to woo the rural muse of Scotia. You are a good, worthy, honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world—because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting the publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas ! I fear it. This protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the poet to far more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit, or the pathos of sentiment. However, *hope* is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavor to cherish it as well as I can. Let me hear from you as soon as convenient. Your work is a great one, and now that it is finished, I see, if I were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended ; yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your publication will be the textbook and standard of Scottish song and music. I am ashamed to ask another favor of you, because you have been so very good already ; but my wife has a very particular friend of hers—a young lady who sings well—to whom she wishes to present the *Scots' Musical Museum*. If you have a spare copy, will you be so obliging as to send it by the first *Fly*, as I am anxious to have it soon."

Turn from James Johnson and his *Scots' Musical Museum* for a moment to George Thomson and his Collection. In September, 1792, Mr. Thomson—who never personally knew Burns—tells him "for some years past I have, with a friend or two, employed many leisure hours in selecting and collating the most favorite of our national melodies for publication ;" and says—"We will esteem your poetical assistance a particular favor ;

besides *paying any reasonable price* you shall please to demand for it." Burns, spurning the thought of being "paid any reasonable price," closes at once with the proposal, "as the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have—strained to the utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm." That enthusiasm for more than three years seldom languished—it was in his heart when his hand could hardly obey its bidding; and on the 12th of July, 1796—eight days after he had written, in the terms you have just seen, to James Johnson for a copy of his *Scots' Musical Museum*—he writes thus to George Thomson for five pounds. "After all my boasted independence, stern necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel —— of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do for God's sake send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness; but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. *I do not ask all this gratuitously; for upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds worth of the neatest song genius you have seen.* FORGIVE ME, FORGIVE ME!"

Mr. Johnson, no doubt, sent a copy of the *Museum*; but we do not know if the *Fly* arrived before the BIER. Mr. Thomson was prompt: and Dr. Currie, speaking of Burns's refusal to become a weekly contributor to the Poet's Corner in the *Morning Chronicle*, at a guinea a week, says, "Yet, he had for several years furnished, and was at that time furnishing, the *Museum* of Johnson, with his beautiful lyrics, without fee or reward, and was obstinately refusing all recompense for his assistance to the greater work of Mr. Thomson, which the justice and generosity of that gentleman was pressing upon him." That obstinacy gave way at last, not under the pressure of Mr. Thomson's generosity and justice, but under "the sense of his poverty, and of the approaching distress of his infant family which pressed," says Dr. Currie truly, "on Burns as he lay on the bed of death."

But we are anticipating; and desire at present to see Burns

“in glory and in joy.” “Whenever I want to be more than ordinary *in song*; to be in some degree equal to your diviner airs, do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation? I have a glorious recipe; the very one that for his own use was invented by the divinity of healing and poetry, when erst he piped to the flocks of Admetus. I put myself on a regimen of admiring a fine woman; and in proportion to the admirability of her charms, in proportion you are delighted with my verses. The lightning of her eye is the godhead of Parnassus; and the witchery of her smile, the divinity of Helicon.” We know the weak side of his character—the sin that most easily beset him—that did indeed “stain his name”—and made him for many seasons the prey of remorse. But though it is not allowed to genius to redeem—though it is falsely said, that “the light that leads astray is light from heaven”—and though Burns’s transgressions must be judged as those of common men, and visited with the same moral reprobation—yet surely we may dismiss them with a sigh from our knowledge, for a while, as we feel the charm of the exquisite poetry originating in the inspiration of passion, purified by genius, and congenial with the utmost innocency of the virgin breast.

In his LOVE-SONGS, all that is best in his own being delights to bring itself into communion with all that is best in theirs whom he visions walking before him in beauty. That beauty is made “still more beauteous” in the light of his genius, and the passion it then moves partakes of the same ethereal color. If love inspired his poetry, poetry inspired his love, and not only inspired but elevated the whole nature of it. If the highest delights of his genius were in the conception and celebration of female loveliness, that trained sensibility was sure to produce extraordinary devotion to the ideal of that loveliness of which innocence is the very soul. If music refine the manners, how much more will it have that effect on him who studies its spirit, as Burns did that of the Scottish songs, in order to marry them to verse? “Until I am complete master of a tune in my own singing, such as it is, I can never compose for it. My way is this: I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression—then choose my theme—compose

one stanza. When that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature round me that are in unison or harmony with the cogitations of my fancy and workings of my bosom, humming every now and then the air, with the verses I have framed. When I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind legs of my elbow chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures, as my pen goes. Seriously, this, at home, is almost invariably my way." Then we know that his Bonnie Jean was generally in his presence, engaged in house affairs, while he was thus on his inspiring swing, that she was among the first to hear each new song recited by her husband, and the first to sing it to him, that he might know if it had been produced to live. He has said, that "musically speaking, conjugal love is an instrument of which the gamut is scanty and confined, but the tones inexpressibly sweet"—that Love, not so confined, "has powers equal to all the intellectual modulations of the human soul." But did not those "tones inexpressibly sweet" often mingle themselves unawares to the Poet with those "intellectual modulations?" And had he not once loved Jean Armour to distraction? His first experiences of the passion of love, in its utmost sweetness and bitterness, had been for her sake, and the memories of those years came often of themselves unbidden into the very heart of his songs when his fancy was for the hour enamored of other beauties.

With a versatility, not compatible perhaps with a capacity of profoundest emotion, but in his case with extreme tenderness, he could instantly assume, and often on the slightest apparent impulse, some imagined character as completely as if it were his own, and realize its conditions. Or he could imagine himself out of all the circumstances by which his individual life was environed, and to all the emotions arising from that transmigration, give utterance as lively as the language inspired by his communion with his own familiar world. Even when he knew he was dying, he looked in Jessie Lewars' face, whom he loved as a father loves his daughter, and that he might re-

ward her filial tenderness for him who was fast wearing away, by an immortal song, in his affection for her he feigned a hopeless passion, and imagined himself the victim of despair ;—

“Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet,
And soft as their parting tear—Jessy !
Although thou maun never be mine,
Although even hope is denied ;
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing,
Than aught in this world beside !”

It was said by one who during a long life kept saying weighty things—old Hobbes—that “in great differences of persons, the greater have often fallen in love with the meaner : but not contrary.” What Gilbert tells us of his brother might seem to corroborate that dictum—“His love rarely settled on persons who were higher than himself, or who had more consequence in life.” This, however, could only apply to the early part of his life. Then he had few opportunities of fixing his affections on persons above him ; and if he had had, their first risings would have been suppressed by his pride. But his after destination so far levelled the inequality that it was not unnatural to address his devotion to ladies of high degree. He then felt that he could command their benevolence, if not inspire their love ; and elated by that consciousness, he feared not to use towards them the language of love, of unbounded passion. He believed, and he was not deceived in the belief, that he could exalt them in their own esteem, by hanging round their proud necks the ornaments of his genius. Therefore, sometimes, he seemed to turn himself away disdainfully from sunburnt bosoms in homespun covering, to pay his vows and adorations to the Queens of Beauty. The devoirs of a poet, whose genius was at their service, have been acceptable to many a high-born dame and damsel, as the submission of a conqueror. Innate superiority made him, in these hours, absolutely unable to comprehend the spirit of society as produced by artificial distinctions, and at all times unwilling to submit to it or pay it homage. “Perfection whispered passing by, Behold the Lass o’ Ballochmyle !” and Burns, too proud to change himself into a lord or squire, imagined what happiness

might have been his if all those charms had budded and blown within a cottage like "a rose-tree in full bearing."

"O, had she been a country maid,
And I the happy country swain,
Tho' sheltered in the lowest shed
That ever rose on Scotland's plain!
Thro' weary winter's wind and rain,
With joy, with rapture, I would toil;
And nightly to my bosom strain
The bonnie lass o' Ballochmyle."

He speaks less passionately of the charms of "bonnie Lesley as she gaed owre the border," for they had not taken him by surprise; he was prepared to behold a queen, and with his own hands he placed upon her head the crown.

"To see her is to love her,
And love but her for ever;
For Nature made her what she is,
And never made anither.

"Thou art a queen, fair Lesley,
Thy subjects we, before thee:
Thou art divine, fair Lesley,
The hearts o' men adore thee."

Nay, evil spirits look in her face and almost become good—while angels love her for her likeness to themselves, and happy she must be on earth in the eye of heaven. We know not much about the "Lovely Davis;" but in his stanzas she is the very Sovereign of Nature.

"Each eye it cheers, when she appears,
Like Phœbus in the morning,
When past the shower, and every flower,
The garden is adorning.
As the wretch looks o'er Siberia's shore,
When winter-bound the wave is;
Sae droops our heart when we must part
Frae charming, lovely Davis.

"Her smile's a gift frae boon the lift
 That makes us mair than princes,
 A scepter'd hand, a king's command,
 Is in her parting glances.
 The man in arms 'gainst female charms,
 Even he her willing slave is ;
 He hugs his chain, and owns the reign
 Of conquering, lovely Davis."

The loveliest of one of the loveliest families in Scotland he changed into a lowly lassie, aye "working her mammie's work," and her lover into Young Robie—"who gaed wi' Jeanie to the tryste, and danced wi' Jeanie on the down." In imagination he is still himself the happy man—his loves are short and rapturous as his lyrics—and while his constancy may be complained of, it is impossible to help admiring the richness of his genius that keeps for ever bringing fresh tribute to her whom he happens to adore.

"Her voice is the voice of the morning,
 That wakes through the green-spreading grove
 When Phœbus peeps over the mountains,
 On music, and pleasure, and love."

That was the voice of one altogether lovely—a lady elegant and accomplished—and adorning a higher condition than his own ; but though finer lines were never written, they are not finer than these four inspired by the passing by of a young woman, on the High Street of Dumfries, with her shoes and stockings in her hand, and her petticoats frugally yet liberally kilted to her knee.

"Her yellow hair, beyond compare,
 Comes tinkling down her swan-white neck,
 And her two eyes, like stars in skies,
 Would keep a sinking ship frae wreck."

It may be thought that such poetry is too high for the people—the common people—"beyond the reaches of their souls ;" but Burns knew better—and he knew that he who would be their poet must put forth all his powers. There is not a single

thought, feeling, or image in all he ever wrote, that has not been comprehended in its full force by thousands and tens of thousands in the very humblest condition. They could not of themselves have conceived them—nor given utterance to anything resembling them to our ears. How dull of apprehension! how unlike gods! But let them be spoken to, and they hear. Their hearts delighted with a strange sweet music which by recognition they understand, are not satisfied with listening, but yearn to respond; and the whole land that for many years had seemed, but was not, silent, in a few months is overflowing with songs that had issued from highest genius it is true, but from the same source that is daily welling out its waters in every human breast. The songs that establish themselves among a people must indeed be simple—but the simplest feelings are the deepest, and once that they have received adequate expression, then they die not—but live for ever.

Many of his Love-songs are, as they ought to be, untinged with earthly desire, and some of these are about the most beautiful of any—as

“Wilt thou be my dearie?

When sorrow wrings thy gentle heart,

Wilt thou let me cheer thee!

By the treasure of my soul,

That's the love I bear thee!

I swear and vow, that only thou

Shalt ever be my dearie.

“Lassie, say thou lo'es me;

Or if thou wilt na be my ain,

Say na thou'lt refuse me:

Let me, lassie, quickly die,

Trusting that thou lo'es me.

Lassie, let me quickly die,

Trusting that thou lo'es me.”

Nothing can be more exquisitely tender—passionless from the excess of passion—pure from very despair—love yet hopes for love's confession, though it feels it can be but a word of pity to sweeten death.

In the most exquisite of his Songs, he connects and blends the

tenderest and most passionate emotions with all appearances—animate and inanimate ; in them all—and in some by a single touch—we are made to feel that we are in the midst of nature. A bird glints by, and we know we are in the woods—a primrose grows up, and we are among the braes—the mere name of a stream brings its banks before us—or two or three words leave us our own choice of many waters.

“ Far dearer to me the lone glen of green bracken,
Wi’ the burn stealing under the lang yellow broom.”

It has been thought that the eyes of “ the laboring poor ” are not very sensible—nay, that they are insensible to scenery—and that the pleasures thence derived are confined to persons of cultivated taste. True, that the country girl, as she “ lifts her leggin, and hies her away,” is thinking more of her lover’s face and figure—whom she hopes to meet in the evening—than of the trysting tree, or of the holm where the grey hawthorn has been standing for hundreds of years. Yet she knows right well that they are beautiful ; and she feels their beauty in the old song she is singing to herself, that at dead of winter recalls the spring time and all the loveliness of the season of leaves. The people know little about painting—how should they ? for unacquainted with the laws of perspective, they cannot *see* the landscape-picture on which instructed eyes gaze till the imagination beholds a paradise. But the landscapes themselves they do see—and they love to look on them. The ploughman does so, as he “ homeward plods his weary way ;” the reaper as he looks at what Burns calls his own light—“ the reaper’s nightly beam, mild chequering through the trees.” If it were not so, why should they call it “ Bonnie Scotland ”—why should they call him “ Sweet Robbie Burns ? ”

In his Songs they think of the flowers as alive, and with hearts : “ How blest the flowers that round thee bloom ! ” In his Songs, the birds they hear singing in common hours with common pleasure, or give them not a thought, without losing their own nature partake of theirs, and shun, share, or mock human passion. He is at once the most accurate and the most poetical

of ornithologists. By a felicitous epithet he characterizes each tribe according to song, plumage, habits, or haunts; often introduces them for the sake of their own happy selves; oftener as responsive to ours, in the expression of their own joys and griefs.

“Oh, stay, sweet warbling wood-lark, stay,
Nor quit for me the trembling spray;
A hapless lover courts thy lay—
Thy soothing, fond complaining.

“Again, again, that tender part,
That I may catch thy melting art;
For surely that wad touch her heart,
Wha kills me wi’ disdainin’.

“Say, was thy little mate unkind,
And heard thee as the careless wind?
Oh, nocht but love and sorrow join’d,
Sic notes o’ love could wauken.

“Thou tells o’ never ending care :
O’ speechless grief, and dark despair ;
For pity’s sake, sweet bird, nae mair,
Or my poor heart is broken !”

Who was Jenny Cruikshank? Only child “of my worthy friend, Mr. William Cruikshank of the High School, Edinburgh.” Where did she live? On a floor at the top of a *common stair*, now marked No. 30, in James’ Square. Burns lived for some time with her father—his room being one which has a window looking out from the gable of the house upon the green behind the Register Office. There was little on that green to look at—perhaps “a washing” laid out to dry. But the poet saw a vision—and many a maiden now often sees it too—whose face may be of the coarsest, and her hair not of the finest—but who in spite of all that, strange to say, has an imagination and a heart.

“A rose-bud by my early walk
Adown a corn-enclosed bawk,
Sae gently bent its thorny stalk
All on a dewy morning;

Ere twice the shades o' dawn are fled,
 In a' its crimson glory spread;
 And drooping rich the dewy head,
 It scents the early morning.

"Within the bush, her covert nest
 A little linnet fondly prest;
 The dew sat chilly on her breast
 Sae early in the morning.
 The morn shall see her tender brood
 The pride, the pleasure o' the wood,
 Among the fresh green leaves bedew'd,
 Awake the early morning.

"So thou, dear bird, young Jeany fair!
 On trembling string, or vocal air,
 Shall sweetly pay the tender care,
 That tends thy early morning.
 So thou, sweet rosebud, young and gay,
 Shalt beauteous blaze upon the day,
 And bless the parent's evening ray,
 That watch'd thy early morning."

Indeed, in all his poetry, what an overflowing of tenderness, pity, and affection towards all living creatures that inhabit the earth, the water, and the air! Of all men that ever lived, Burns was the least of a sentimentalist; he was your true Man of Feeling. He did not preach to Christian people the duty of humanity to animals; he spoke of them in winning words warm from a manliest breast, as his fellow-creatures, and made us feel what we owe. What child could well be cruel to a helpless animal who had read "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Maillie"—or "The Twa Dogs?" "The Auld Farmer's New-year's-day Address to his Auld Mare Maggie" has—we know—humanized the heart of a Gilmerton carter. "Not a mouse stirring," are gentle words at that hour from Shakspeare—when thinking of the ghost of a king; and he would have loved brother Burns for saying—"What makes thee startle, at me thy poor earth-born companion *and fellow mortal!*" Safe-housed at fall of a stormy winter night, of whom does the poet think, along with the unfortunate, the erring, and the guilty of his own race?

“List’ning the doors an’ winnocks rattle,
 I thought me on the ourie cattle,
 Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
 O’ winter war,
 An’ thro’ the drift, deep-lairing sprattle,
 Beneath a scar.

“Ilk happing bird, wee, helpless thing,
 That in the merry months o’ spring
 Delighted me to hear thee sing,
 What comes o’ thee?
 Whare wilt thou cow’r thy chittering wing,
 An’ close thy e’e?”

The poet loved the sportsman ; but lamenting in fancy “Tom Samson’s Death”—he could not help thinking, that “on his mouldering breast, some spitefu’ muirfowl bigs her nest.” When at Kirkoswald studying trigonometry, plane and spherical, he sometimes associated with smugglers, but never with poachers. You cannot figure to yourself young Robert Burns stealing stoopingly along under cover of a hedge, with a long gun and a lurcher, to get a shot at a hare sitting, and perhaps washing her face with her paws. No tramper ever “coft fur” at Mossiel or Ellisland. He could have joined, had he liked, in the passionate ardor of the rod and the gun the net and the leister ; but he liked rather to think of all those creatures alive and well, “in their native element.” In his love-song to “the charming filette who overset his trigonometry,” and incapacitated him for the taking of the sun’s altitude, he says to her, on proposing to take a walk—

“Now westlin winds, and slaught’ring guns,
 Bring autumn’s pleasant weather ;
 The moorcock springs, on whirring wings,
 Amang the blooming heather.

“The partridge loves the fruitful fells ;
 The plover loves the mountains ;
 The woodcock haunts the lonely dells ;
 The soaring hern the fountains :
 Thro’ lofty groves the cushat roves,
 The path of man to shun it ;

The hazel bush o'erhangs the thrush,
The spreading thorn the linnet.

"Thus ev'ry kind their pleasure find
The savage and the tender;
Some social join, and leagues combine;
Some solitary wander:
Avaunt, away! the cruel sway,
Tyrannic man's dominion;
The sportsman's joy, the murd'ring cry,
The flutt'ring, gory pinion!"

Bruar Water, in his Humble Petition to the Noble Duke of Athole, prays that his banks may be made sylvan, that shepherd, lover, and bard may enjoy the shades; but chiefly for sake of the inferior creatures.

"Delighted doubly then, my Lord,
You'll wander on my banks,
And listen many a gratefu' bird
Return you tunefu' thanks."

The sober laverock—the gowdspink gay—the strong blackbird—the clear lintwhite—the mavis mild and mellow—they will all sing "God bless the Duke." And one mute creature will be more thankful than all the rest—"coward maukin sleep secure, low in her grassy form." You know that he threatened to throw Jem Thomson, a farmer's son near Ellisland, into the Nith, for shooting at a hare—and in several of his morning landscapes a hare is hirpling by. What human and poetical sympathy is there in his address to the startled wild fowl on Loch Turit! He speaks of "parent, filial, kindred ties;" and in the closing lines who does not feel that it is *Burns* that speaks?

"Or, if man's superior might,
Dare invade your native right,
On the lofty ether borne
Man with all his powers you scorn;
Swiftly seek, on clanging wings,
Other lakes and other springs;
And the foe you cannot brave,
Scorn, at least, to be his slave."

Whatever be his mood, grave or gladsome, mirthful or melancholy—or when sorrow smiles back to joy, or care joins hands with folly—he has always a thought to give to them who many think have no thought, but who all seemed to him, from highest to lowest in that scale of being, to possess each its appropriate degree of intelligence and love. In the “Sonnet written on his birth-day, January 25th, 1793, on hearing a thrush sing in a morning-walk,” it is truly affecting to hear how he connects, on the sudden, his own condition with all its cares and anxieties, with that of the cheerful bird upon the leafless bough—

“Yet come, thou child of poverty and care,
The mite high Heaven bestows, that mite with thee I'll share.”

We had intended to speak only of his Songs; and to them we return for a few minutes more, asking you to notice how cheering such of them as deal gladsomely with the concerns of this world must be to the hearts of them who of their own accord sing them to themselves, at easier work, or intervals of labor, or at gloaming when the day's darg is done. All partings are not sad—most are the reverse; lovers do not fear that they shall surely die the day after they have kissed farewell; on the contrary they trust, with the blessing of God, to be married at the term.

“Jockey's ta'en the parting kiss,
O'er the mountains he is gane;
And with him is a' my bliss,
Naught but griefs with me remain.

“Spare my luve, ye winds that blaw,
Plashy sleets and beating rain!
Spare my luve, thou feathery snaw,
Drifting o'er the frozen plain.

“When the shades of evening creep
O'er the day's fair, gladsome e'e,
Sound and safely may he sleep,
Sweetly blythe his waukening be!

“He will think on her he loves,
Fondly he'll repeat her name;

For where'er he distant roves,
Jockey's heart is still at hame."

There is no great matter or merit, some one may say, in such lines as these—nor is there ; but they express sweetly enough some natural sentiments, and what more would you have in a song ? You have had far more in some songs to which we have given the go-by ; but we are speaking now of the class of the simply pleasant ; and on us their effect is like that of a gentle light falling on a pensive place, when there are no absolute clouds in the sky, and no sun visible either, but when that soft effusion, we know not whence, makes the whole day that had been somewhat sad, serene, and reminds us that it is summer. Believing you feel as we do, we do not fear to displease you by quoting "The Tither Morn."

"The tither morn, when I forlorn,
Aneath an aik sat moaning,
I didna trow, I'd see my jo,
Beside me, gain the gloaming.
But he sae trig, lap o'er the rig,
And dauntingly did cheer me,
When I, what reck, did least expect',
To see my lad so near me.

"His bonnet he, a thought ajee,
Cocked sprush when first he clasp'd me ;
And I, I wat, wi' fairness grat,
While in his grips he pressed me.
Deil take the war ! I late and air,
Hae wished syne Jock departed ;
But now as glad I'm wi' my lad,
As short syne broken-hearted.

"I'm aft at e'en wi' dancing keen,
When a' were blithe and merry,
I car'd na by, sae sad was I,
In absence o' my dearie.
But praise be blest, my mind's at rest,
I'm happy wi' my Johnny :
At kirk and fair, I'll aye be there,
And be as canty's ony."

We believe that the most beautiful of his Songs are dearest to the people, and these are the passionate and the pathetic ; but there are some connected in one way or other with the tender passion, great favorites too, from the light and lively, up to the humorous and comic—yet among the broadest of that class there is seldom any coarseness—indecency never—vulgar you may call some of them, if you please ; they were not intended to be *genteel*. Flirts and coquettes of both sexes are of every rank ; in humble life the saucy and scornful toss their heads full high, or “go by like stoure ;” “for sake o’ gowd she left me” is a complaint heard in all circles ; “although the night be neer sae wet, and he be neer sae weary O,” a gentleman of a certain age will make himself ridiculous by dropping on the knees of his corduroy breeches ; Auntie would fain become a mother, and in order thereunto a wife, and waylays a hobbletehoj ; daughters the most filial think nothing of breaking their mothers’ hearts as their grandmothers’ were broken before them ; innocents, with no other teaching but that of nature, in the conduct of intrigues in which verily there is neither shame nor sorrow, become systematic and consummate hypocrites, not worthy to live—single ; despairing swains are saved from suicide by peals of laughter from those for whom they fain would die, and so get noosed ;—and surely here is a field—indicated and no more—wide enough for the Scottish Comic Muse, and would you know how productive to the hand of genius you have but to read Burns.

In one of his letters he says, “If I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes.” His nature was indeed humane ; and the tendernesses and kindlinesses apparent in every page of his poetry, and most of all in his Songs—cannot but have a humanizing influence on all those classes exposed by the necessities of their condition to many causes for ever at work to harden or shut up the heart. Burns does not keep continually holding up to them the evils of their lot, continually calling on them to endure or to redress ; but while he stands up for his Order, its virtues, and its rights, and has bolts to hurl at the oppressor, his delight is to inspire contentment. In that solemn—“Dirge,”—a spiritual being, suddenly spied in the gloom, seems an Apparition, made sage by sufferings

in the flesh, sent to instruct us and all who breathe that "Man was made to mourn."

"Many and sharp the numerous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves,
Regret, remorse, and shame!
And man, whose heaven-erected face
The smiles of love adorn,
Man's inhumanity to man,
Makes countless thousands mourn!

"See yonder poor, o'er-labor'd wight,
So abject, mean, and vile,
Who begs a brother of the earth
To give him leave to toil;
And see his lordly *fellow-worm*
The poor petition spurn,
Unmindful, tho' a weeping wife
And helpless offspring mourn."

But we shall suppose that "brother of the earth" rotten, and forgotten by the "bold peasantry, their country's pride," who work without leave from worms. At his work we think we hear a stalwart tiller of the soil humming what must be a verse of Burns.

"Is there for honest poverty,
That hangs his head, and a' that?
The coward slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
What tho' on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey, and a' that;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that.

"Then let us pray, that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,
May bear the gree, and a' that.
For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that."

A spirit of Independence reigned alike in the Genius and the Character of Burns. And what is it but a strong sense of what is due to Worth, apart altogether from the distinctions of society—the vindication of that Worth being what he felt to be the most honored call upon himself in life? That sense once violated is destroyed, and therefore he guarded it as a sacred thing—only less sacred than Conscience. Yet it belongs to Conscience, and is the prerogative of Man as Man. Sometimes it may seem as if he watched it with jealousy, and in jealousy there is always weakness, because there is fear. But it was not so; he felt assured that his footing was firm and that his back was on a rock. No blast could blow, no air could beguile him from the position he had taken up with his whole soul in “its pride of place.” His words were justified by his actions, and his actions truly told his thoughts; his were a bold heart, a bold hand, and a bold tongue, for in the nobility of his nature he knew that though born and bred in a hovel, he was the equal of the highest in the land; as he was—and no more—of the lowest, so that they too were MEN. For hear him speak—“What signify the silly, idle gew-gaws of wealth, or the ideal trumpery of greatness! When fellow-partakers of the same nature fear the same God, have the same benevolence of heart, the same nobleness of soul, the same detestation at everything dishonest, and the same scorn at everything unworthy—if they are not in the dependence of absolute beggary, in the name of common sense are they not EQUALS? And if the bias, the instinctive bias of their souls were the same way, why may they not be FRIENDS? He was indeed privileged to write that “Inscription for an Altar to Independence.”

“Thou of an independent mind,
With soul resolved, with soul resigned;
Prepared Power’s proudest frown to brave,
Who wilt not be, nor have a slave;
Virtue alone who dost revere,
Thy own reproach alone dost fear,
Approach this shrine, and worship here.”

Scotland’s adventurous sons are now as proud of this moral feature of his poetry as of all the pictures it contains of their native

country. Bound up in one volume it is the Manual of Independence. Were they not possessed of the same spirit, they would be ashamed to open it; but what they wear they win, what they eat they earn, and if frugal they be—and that is the right word—it is that on their return they may build a house on the site of their father's hut, and proud to remember that he was poor, live so as to deserve the blessings of the children of them who walked with him to daily labor on what was then no better than a wilderness, but has now been made to blossom like the rose. Ebenezer Elliot is no flatterer—and he said to a hundred and twenty Scotsmen in Sheffield met to celebrate the birth-day of Burns—

“ Stern Mother of the deathless dead !

Where stands a Scot, a freeman stands ;
Self-stayed, if poor—self-clothed—self-fed ;
Mind-mighty in all lands.

“ No wicked plunder need thy sons,

To save the wretch whom mercy spurns,
No classic lore thy little ones,
Who find a Bard in Burns.

“ Their path tho' dark, they may not miss ;

Secure they tread on danger's brink ;
They say ‘ this shall be ’ and it is :
For ere they act, they think.”

There are, it is true, some passages in his poetry, and more in his letters, in which this Spirit of Independence partakes too much of pride, and expresses itself in anger and scorn. These, however, were but passing moods, and he did not love to cherish them ; no great blame had they been more frequent and permanent—for his noble nature was exposed to many causes of such irritation, but it triumphed over them all. A few indignant flashes broke out against the littleness of the great ; but nothing so paltry as personal pique inspired him with feelings of hostility towards the highest orders. His was an imagination that clothed high rank with that dignity which some of the degenerate descendants of old houses had forgotten ; and whenever true noblemen “ revered the lyre ” and grasped the hand of the

peasant who had received it from nature as his patrimony, Burns felt it to be nowise inconsistent with the stubbornest independence that ever supported a son of the soil in his struggles with necessity, reverently to doff his bonnet, and bow his head in their presence with proud humility. Jeffrey did himself honor by acknowledging that he had been at first misled by occasional splenetic passages, in his estimation of Burns's character, and by afterwards joining, in eloquent terms, in the praise bestowed by other kindred spirits on the dignity of its independence. "It is observed," says Campbell with his usual felicity, "that he boasts too much of his independence; but in reality this boast is neither frequent nor obtrusive; and it is in itself the expression of a noble and laudable feeling. So far from calling up disagreeable recollections of rusticity, his sentiments triumph, by their natural energy, over those false and artificial distinctions which the mind is but too apt to form in allotting its sympathies to the sensibilities of the rich and poor. He carries us into the humble scenes of life, not to make us dole out our tribute of charitable compassion to paupers and cottagers, but to make us feel with them on equal terms, to make us enter into their passions and interests, and share our hearts with them as brothers and sisters of the human species."

In nothing else is the sincerity of his soul more apparent than in his Friendship. All who had ever been kind to him he loved till the last. It mattered not to him what was their rank or condition—he returned, and more than returned their affection—he was, with regard to such ties, indeed of the family of the faithful. The consciousness of his infinite superiority to the common race of men, and of his own fame and glory as a Poet, never for a moment made him forget the humble companions of his obscure life, or regard with a haughty eye any face that had ever worn towards him an expression of benevolence. The Smiths, the Muirs, the Browns, and the Parkers, were to him as the Aikens, the Ballantynes, the Hamiltons, the Cunninghams, and the Ainslies—these as the Stewarts, the Gregorys, the Blairs and the Mackenzies—these again as the Grahams and the Erskines—and these as the Daers, the Glencairns, and the other men of rank who were kind to him—all were his friends—his benefac-

tors. His heart expanded towards them all, and throbbed with gratitude. His eldest son—and he has much of his father's intellectual power—bears his own Christian name—the others are *James Glencairn*, and *William Nicol*—so called respectively after a nobleman to whom he thought he owed all—and a school-master to whom he owed nothing—yet equally entitled to bestow—or receive that honor.

There is a beautiful passage in his Second Common Place Book, showing how deeply he felt, and how truly he valued, the patronage which the worthy alone can bestow. “What pleasure is in the power of the fortunate and happy, by their notice and patronage, to brighten the countenance and glad the heart of depressed worth! I am not so angry with mankind for their deaf economy of the purse. The goods of this world cannot be divided without being lessened; but why be a niggard of that which bestows bliss on a fellow creature, yet takes nothing from our own means of enjoyment? Why wrap ourselves in the cloak of our own better fortune, and turn away our eyes lest the wants and cares of our brother mortals should disturb the selfish apathy of our souls?” What was the amount of all the kindness shown him by the Earl of Glencairn? That excellent nobleman at once saw that he was a great genius,—gave him the hand of friendship—and in conjunction with Sir John Whiteford got the members of the Caledonian Hunt to subscribe for guinea instead of six shilling copies of his volume. That was all—and it was well. For that Burns was as grateful as for the preservation of life.

“The bridegroom may forget the bride
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;
The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head an hour hath been;
The mother may forget the child
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
And a' that thou hast done for me.”

He went into mourning on the death of his benefactor, and desired to know where he was to be buried, that he might attend the funeral, and drop a tear into his grave.

The “Lament for Glencairn” is one of the finest of Ele-

gies. We cannot agree with those critics—some of them of deserved reputation—who have objected to the form in which the poet chose to give expression to his grief. Imagination, touched by human sorrow, loves to idealize; because thereby it purifies, elevates, and ennobles realities, without impairing the pathos belonging to them in nature. Many great poets—nor do we fear now to mention Milton among the number—have in such strains celebrated the beloved dead. They have gone out, along with the object of their desire, from the real living world in which they had been united, and shadowed forth in imagery that bears a high similitude to it, all that was most spiritual in the communion now broken in upon by the mystery of death. So it is in the *Lycidas*—and so it is in this “*Lament*.” Burns imagines an aged Bard giving vent to his sorrow for his noble master’s untimely death, among the “fading yellow woods, that wav’d o’er Lugar’s winding stream.” That name at once awakens in us the thought of his own dawning genius; and though his head was yet dark as the raven’s wing, and “the locks were bleached white with time” of the Apparition evoked with his wailing harp among the “winds lamenting thro’ the caves,” yet we feel on the instant that the imaginary mourner is one and the same with the real—that the old and the young are inspired with the same passion, and have but one heart. We are taken out of the present time, and placed in one far remote—yet by such removal the personality of the poet, so far from being weakened, is enveloped in a melancholy light that shows it more endearingly to our eyes—the harp of other years sounds with the sorrow that never dies—the words heard are the everlasting language of affection—and is not the object of such lamentation aggrandized by thus being lifted into the domain of poetry?

“I’ve seen sae mony changefu’ years,
 On earth I am a stranger grown;
 I wander in the ways of men,
 Alike unknowing and unknown;
 Unheard, unpitied, unreliev’d:
 I bear alane my lade o’ care,
 For silent, low, on beds of dust,
 Lie a’ that would my sorrows share.

“And last (the sum of a’ my griefs !)
 My noble master lies in clay ;
 THE FLOW’R AMANG OUR BARONS BOLD,
 HIS COUNTRY’S PRIDE, HIS COUNTRY’S STAY ”

We go along with such a mourner in his exaltation of the character of the mourned—great must have been the goodness to generate such gratitude—that which would have been felt to be exaggeration, if expressed in a form not thus imaginative, is here brought within our unquestioning sympathy—and we are prepared to return to the event in its reality, with undiminished fervor, when Burns re-appears in his own character without any disguise, and exclaims—

“Awake thy last sad voice, my harp,
 The voice of wo and wild despair ;
 Awake, resound thy latest lay,
 Then sleep in silence evermair !
 And thou, my last, best, only friend,
 That fillest an untimely tomb,
 Accept this tribute from the bard
 Thou brought from fortune’s mirkest gloom.

“In poverty’s low, barren vale,
 Thick mists, obscure, involv’d me round ;
 Though oft I turned the wistful eye,
 Nae ray of fame was to be found :
 Thou found’st me, like the morning sun,
 That melts the fogs in limpid air,
 The friendless bard and rustic song
 Became alike thy fostering care.”

‘The Elegy on “Captain Matthew Henderson”’—of whom little or nothing is now known—is a wonderfully fine flight of imagination, but it wants, we think, the deep feeling of the “Lament.” It may be called a Rapture. Burns says, “It is a tribute to a man I loved much ;” and in “The Epitaph” which follows it, he draws his character—and a noble one it is—in many points resembling his own. With the exception of the opening and concluding stanzas, the Elegy consists entirely of a supplication to Nature to join with him in lamenting the death of the “ae best fellow e’er was born ;” and though to our ears

there is something grating in that term, yet the disagreeableness of it is done away by the words immediately following :

“ Thee, Matthew, Nature’s sel’ shall mourn,
By wood and wild,
Where, haply, pity strays forlorn,
By man exil’d.”

The poet is no sooner on the wing, than he rejoices in his strength of pinion, and with equal ease soars and stoops. We know not where to look, in the whole range of poetry, for an Invocation to the great and fair objects of the external world, so rich and various in imagery, and throughout so sustained ; and here again we do not fear to refer to the *Lycidas*—and to say that Robert Burns will stand a comparison with John Milton.

“ But oh, the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return !
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves,
With wild thyme, and the gadding vine o’ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn :
The willows and the hazel copses green
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the white-thorn blows ;
Such, *Lycidas*, thy loss to shepherd’s ear.

* * * * *

* * * Return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells and flowerets of a thousand hues,
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart-star sparsely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enamell’d eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rath primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freak’d with jet,
The growing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,

With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
 Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
 And daffodillies fill their cups with tears,
 To strew the Laureat herse where Lycid lies."

All who know the "Lycidas," know how impossible it is to detach any one single passage from the rest, without marring its beauty of relationship—without depriving it of the charm consisting in the rise and fall—the undulation—in which the whole divine poem now gently and now magnificently fluctuates. But even when thus detached, the poetry of these passages is exquisite—the expression is perfect—consummate art has crowned the conceptions of inspired genius—and shall we dare set by their side stanzas written by a ploughman? We shall. But first hear Wordsworth. In the *Excursion*, the Pedlar says—and the Exciseman corroborates its truth—

"The poets in their elegies and hymns
 Lamenting the departed, call the groves;
 They call upon the hills and streams to mourn;
 And senseless rocks; nor idly: for they speak
 In these their invocations with a voice
 Of human passion."

You have heard Milton—hear Burns—

"Ye hills, near neebors o' the starns,
 That proudly cock your crested cairns!
 Ye cliffs, the haunts of sailing yearns,
 Where echo slumbers!
 Come join ye, Nature's sturdiest bairns,
 My wailing numbers!"

"Mourn, ilka grove the cushat kens!
 Ye haz'lly shaws and briery dens!
 Ye burnies, wimplin' down your glens,
 Wi' toddlin' din,
 Or foaming strang, wi' hasty stens,
 Frae linn to linn!"

"Mourn, little harebells o'er the lea,
 Ye stately foxgloves fair to see,

Ye woodbines, hanging bonnilie, -
 In scented bow'rs;
Ye roses on your thorny tree,
 The first o' flow'rs.

“ At dawn, when ev'ry grassy blade
 Droops with a diamond at its head;
At ev'n, when beans their fragrance shed,
 I' th' rustling gale;
Ye maukins whiddin thro' the glade,
 Come join my wail

“ Mourn, ye wee songsters o' the wood;
Ye grouse that crap the heather bud;
Ye kurlaws calling thro' a clud;
 Ye whistling plover;
And mourn, ye whirring paitrick brood!
 He's gane for ever!

“ Mourn, sooty coots, and speckled teals;
Ye fisher herons, watching eels;
Ye duck and drake, wi' airy wheels
 Circling the lake
Ye bitterns, till the quagmire reels,
 Rair for his sake.

“ Mourn, clam'ring craiks at close o' day,
'Mang fields o' flowing clover gay;
And when ye wing your annual way
 Frae our cauld shore,
Tell thae far worlds, wha lies in clay,
 Wham ye deplore.

“ Ye houlets, frae your ivy bow'r,
In some auld tree, or eldritch tow'r,
What time the moon, wi' silent glow'r
 Sets up her horn,
Wail thro' the dreary midnight hour
 Till waukrife morn!

“ Oh, rivers, forests, hills, and plains!
Oft have ye heard my canty strains:
But now, what else for me remains
 But tales of wo?
And frae my een the drapping rains
 Maun ever flow.

Whose verse in manhood's pride sublimely flows,
 Yet vilest reptiles in their begging prose.
 Mark, how their lofty independent spirit
 Soars on the spurning wing of injur'd merit !
 Seek not the proofs in private life to find ;
 Pity the best of words should be but wind !
 So to heaven's gates the lark's shrill song ascends,
 But groveling on the earth the carol ends.
 In all the clam'rous cry of starving want,
 They dun benevolence with shameless front
 Oblige them, patronise their tinsel lays,
 They persecute you all their future days !
 Ere my poor soul such deep damnation stain,
 My horny fist assume the plough again ;
 The pie-bald jacket let me patch once more ;
On eighteen-pence a-week I've liv'd before.
 Tho' thanks to heaven, I dare even that last shift
 I trust, meantime, my boon is in thy gift :
 That, plac'd by thee upon the wish'd-for height,
 Where, man and nature fairer in her sight,
 My muse may imp her wing for some sublimer flight."

Read over again the last three lines ! The favor requested was removal from the laborious and extensive district which he *surveyed* for the Excise at Ellisland to one of smaller dimensions at Dumfries ! In another Epistle, he renews the request, and says most affectingly—

"I dread thee, fate, relentless and severe,
 With all a poet's, husband's, father's fear !
 Already one strong hold of hope is lost,
 Glencairn, the truly noble, lies in dust
 (Fled, like the sun eclips'd at noon appears,
 And left us darkling in a world of tears) ;
 Oh ! hear my ardent, grateful, selfish prayer !—
 Fintry, my other stay, long bless and spare !
 Thro' a long life his hopes and wishes crown ;
 And bright in cloudless skies his sun go down !
 May bliss domestic smoothe his private path,
 Give energy to life, and soothe his latest breath,
 With many a filial tear circling the bed of death ?"

The favor was granted—and in another Epistle was requited with immortal thanks.

“I call no goddess to inspire my strains,
A fabled muse may suit a bard that feigns;
Friend of my life ! my ardent spirit burns,
And all the tribute of my heart returns,
For boons accorded, goodness ever new,
The gift still dearer, as the giver, you.

“Thou orb of day ! thy other paler light !
And all ye many sparkling stars of night ;
If aught that giver from my mind efface,
If I that giver's bounty e'er disgrace ;
Then roll to me, along your wandering spheres,
Only to number out a villain's years !”

Love, Friendship, Independence, Patriotism—these were the perpetual inspirers of his genius, even when they did not form the theme of his effusions. His religious feelings, his resentment against hypocrisy, and other occasional inspirations, availed only to the occasion on which they appear. But these influence him at all times, even while there is not a whisper about them, and when himself is unconscious of their operation. Everything most distinctive of his character will be found to appertain to them, whether we regard him as a poet or a man. His Patriotism was of the true poetic kind—intense—exclusive ; Scotland and the climate of Scotland were in his eyes the dearest to nature—Scotland and the people of Scotland the mother and the children of liberty. In his exultation, when a thought of foreign lands crossed his fancy, he asked, “What are they ? the haunts of the tyrant and slave.” This was neither philosophical nor philanthropical ; in this Burns was a bigot. And the cosmopolite may well laugh to hear the cottager proclaiming that “the brave Caledonian views with disdain” spicy forests and gold-bubbling fountains with their ore and their nutmegs—and blessing himself in scant apparel on “cauld Caledonia's blast on the wave.” The doctrine will not stand the scrutiny of judgment ; but with what concentrated power of poetry does the prejudice burst forth ? Let all lands have each its own prejudiced, bigoted, patriotic poets, blind and deaf to what lies beyond their own horizon, and thus shall the whole habitable world in due time be glorified. Shakspeare himself was never

so happy as when setting up England in power, in beauty, and in majesty above all the kingdoms of the earth.

In times of national security the feeling of Patriotism among the masses is so quiescent that it seems hardly to exist—in their case national glory or national danger awakens it, and it leaps up armed *cap-a-pie*. But the sacred fire is never extinct in a nation, and in tranquil times it is kept alive in the hearts of those who are called to high functions in the public service—by none is it *beeted* so surely as by the poets. It is the identification of individual feeling and interest with those of a community; and so natural to the human soul is this enlarged act of sympathy, that when not called forth by some great pursuit, peril, or success, it applies itself intensely to internal policy; and hence the animosities and rancor of parties, which are evidences, nay forms, though degenerate ones, of the Patriotic Feeling; and this is proved by the fact that on the approach of common danger, party differences in a great measure cease, and are transmuted into the one harmonious elemental Love of our Native Land. Burns was said at one time to have been a Jacobin as well as a Jacobite; and it must have required even all his genius to effect such a junction. He certainly wrote some so-so verses to the Tree of Liberty, and like Cowper, Wordsworth, and other great and good men, rejoiced when down fell the Bastille. But when there was a talk of taking our Island, he soon evinced the nature of his affection for the French.

“Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?

Then let the loons beware, Sir,

There’s wooden walls upon our seas,

And volunteers on shore, Sir.

The Nith shall run to Corsincon,

And Criffel sink in Solway,

Ere we permit a foreign foe

On British ground to rally.

Fall de rall, &c.

“O let us not like snarling tykes

In wrangling be divided;

Till slap come in an unco loon

And wi’ a rung decide it.

Be Britain still to Britain true,
 Amang oursels united;
 For never but by British hands
 Maun British wrangs be righted.
 Fall de rall, &c.

“The kettle o’ the kirk and state,
 Perhaps a claut may fail in’t;
 But deil a foreign tinker loun
 Shall ever ca’ a nail in’t.
 Our fathers’ bluid the kettle bought,
 And wha wad dare to spoil it;
 By heaven the sacrilegious dog
 Shall fuel be to boil it.
 Fall de rall, &c.

“The wretch that wad a tyrant own,
 And the wretch his true-born brother,
 Who would set the *mob* aboon the *throne*,
 May they be damn’d together!
 Who will not sing, ‘God save the King,’
 Shall hang as high ’s the steeple;
 But while we sing, ‘God save the King,’
 We’ll ne’er forget the People.”

These are far from being “elegant” stanzas—there is even a rudeness about them—but ’t is the rudeness of the Scottish Thistle—a paraphrase of “*nemo me impune lacesset*.” The staple of the war-song is home-grown and home-spun. It flouts the air like a banner *not* idly spread, whereon “the ruddy Lion ramps in gold.” Not all the orators of the day, in Parliament or out of it, in all their speeches put together embodied more political wisdom, or appealed with more effective power to the noblest principles of patriotism in the British heart.

“A gentleman of birth and talents” thus writes, in 1835, to Allan Cunninghame: “I was at the play in Dumfries, October, 1792, the Caledonian Hunt being then in town—the play was ‘As you like it’—Miss Fontenelle, Rosalind—when ‘God save the king’ was called for and sung; we all stood up uncovered, but Burns sat still in the middle of the pit, with his hat on his head. There was a great tumult, with shouts of ‘turn him out’ and ‘shame Burns!’ which continued a good while; at last he

was either expelled or forced to take off his hat—*I forget which.*” And a lady with whom Robert Chambers once conversed, “remembered being present in the theatre of Dumfries, during the heat of the Revolution, when Burns entered the pit somewhat affected by liquor. On *God save the king* being struck up, the audience rose as usual, all except the intemperate poet, who cried for *Ca ira*. A tumult was the consequence, and Burns was compelled to leave the house.” We cannot believe that Burns ever was guilty of such vulgar insolence—such brutality; nothing else at all like it is recorded of him—and the worthy story-tellers are not at one as to the facts. The gentleman’s memory is defective; but had he himself been the offender, surely he would not have forgot whether he had been compelled to take off his hat, or had been jostled, perhaps only kicked out of the play-house. The lady’s eyes and ears were sharper—for she saw “Burns enter the pit somewhat affected by liquor,” and then heard him “cry for *Ca ira*.” By what means he was “compelled to leave the house,” she does not say; but as he was “sitting in the middle of the pit,” he must have been walked out very gently, so as not to have attracted the attention of the male narrator. If this public outrage of all decorum, decency, and loyalty, had been perpetrated by Burns, *in October*, one is at a loss to comprehend how, *in December*, he could have been “surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr. Mitchell, the Collector, telling me that he has received an order for your Board to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government.” The fact we believe to be this—that Burns, whose loyalty was suspected, had been rudely commanded to take off his hat by some vociferous time-servers—*just as he was going to do so*—that the row arose from his declining to uncover on compulsion, and subsided on his disdainfully doffing his beaver of his own accord. Had he cried for *Ca ira*, he would have deserved dismissal from the Excise; and in his own opinion, translation to another post—“Wha will not sing *God save the King*, shall hang as high’s the steeple.” *The year before*, “during the heat of the French Revolution,” Burns composed his grand war-song—“Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth, and ye skies,” and sent it to Mrs. Dunlop with these

words: "I have just finished the following song, which to a lady, the descendant of Wallace, and many heroes of his truly illustrious line—and herself the mother of several soldiers—needs neither preface nor apology." And *the year after*, he composed "The Poor and Honest Sodger," "which was sung," says Allan Cuninghame, "in every cottage, village, and town. Yet the man who wrote it was supposed by the mean and the spiteful to be no well-wisher to his country!" Why, as men who have any hearts at all, love their parents in any circumstances, so they love their country, be it great or small, poor or wealthy, learned or ignorant, free or enslaved; and even disgrace and degradation will not quench their filial affection to it. But Scotsmen have good reason to be proud of their country; not so much for any particular event, as for her whole historical progress. Particular events, however, are thought of by them as the landmarks of that progress; and these are the great points of history "conspicuous in the nation's eye." Earlier times present "the unconquered Caledonian spear;" later, the unequal but generally victorious struggles with the sister country, issuing in national independence; and later still, the holy devotion of the soul of the people to their own profound religious Faith, and its simple Forms. Would that Burns had pondered more on that warfare! That he had sung its final triumph! But we must be contented with his "Scots wha hæ wi' Wallace bled;" and with repeating after it with him, "So may God defend the cause of truth and liberty, as he did that day! Amen!"

Mr. Syme tells us that Burns composed this ode on the 31st of July, 1793, on the moor road between Kenmure and Gatehouse. "The sky was sympathetic with the wretchedness of the soil; it became lowering and dark—the winds sighed hollow—the lightning gleamed—the thunders rolled. The poet enjoyed the awful scene—he spoke not a word—but seemed rapt in meditation. In a little while the rain began to fall—it poured in floods upon us. For three hours did the wild elements rumble their bellyful upon our defenceless heads." That is very fine indeed; and "what do you think," asks Mr. Syme, "Burns was about? He was charging the English Army along with Bruce

at Bannockburn." On the second of August—when the weather was more sedate—on their return from St. Mary's Isle to Dumfries, "he was engaged in the same manner;" and it appears from one of his own letters, that he returned to the charge one evening in September. The thoughts, and feelings, and images, came rushing upon him during the storm—they formed themselves into stanzas, like so many awkward squads of raw levies, during the serene state of the atmosphere—and under the harvest moon, firm as the measured tread of marching men, with admirable precision they wheeled into line. This account of the composition of the Ode would seem to clear Mr. Syme from a charge nothing short of falsehood brought against him by Allan Cuninghame. Mr. Syme's words are, "I said that in the midst of the storm, on the wilds of Kenmure, Burns was rapt in meditation. What do you think he was about? He was charging the English army along with Bruce at Bannockburn. He was engaged in the same manner in our ride home from St. Mary's Isle, and I did not disturb him. *Next day he produced me the address of Bruce to his troops, and gave me a copy to Dalzell.*" Nothing can be more circumstantial; and if not true, it is a thumper. Allan says, "Two or three plain words, and a stubborn date or two, will go far I fear to raise this pleasing legend into the regions of romance. The Galloway adventure, according to Syme, happened in July; but in the succeeding September, the poet announced the song to Thomson in these words: 'There is a tradition which I have met with in many places in Scotland that the air of "*Hey tuttie taittie*" was Robert Bruce's march at the Battle of Bannockburn. This thought in my *yesternight's evening walk* warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode—that one might suppose to be the royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning. I showed the air to Urbani, who was greatly pleased with it, and begged me to make soft verses for it; but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the subject till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing idea of some other struggles of the same nature, not quite so ancient, roused up my rhyming mania?'

Currie, to make the letter agree with the legend, altered *yesternight's evening walk* into solitary wanderings. Burns was indeed a remarkable man, and yielded no doubt to strange impulses; but to compose a song 'in thunder, lightning, and in rain,' intimates such self-possession as few possess." We can more readily believe that Burns wrote "*yesternight's evening walk*," to save himself the trouble of entering into any detail of his previous study of the subject, than that Syme told a downright lie. As to composing a song in a thunder-storm, Cunningham—who is himself "a remarkable man," and has composed some songs worthy of being classed with those of Burns, would find it one of the easiest and pleasantest of feats; for lightning is among the most harmless vagaries of the electric fluid, and in a hilly country, seldom singes but worsted stockings and sheep.

Burns sent the Address in its perfection to George Thomson—recommending it to be set to the old air—" *Hey tuttie taittie* "—according to Tradition, who cannot, however, be reasonably expected "to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth"—Robert Bruce's march at the Battle of Bannockburn. A committee of taste sat on "*Hey tuttie taittie*," and pronounced it execrable. "I happened to dine yesterday," says Mr. Thomson, "with a party of your friends, to whom I read it. They were all charmed with it; entreated me to find out a suitable air for it, and reprobated the idea of giving it a tune so totally devoid of interest or grandeur as '*Hey tuttie taittie*.' Assuredly your partiality for this tune must arise from the ideas associated in your mind by the tradition concerning it, for I never heard any person—and I have conversed again and again with the greatest enthusiasts for Scottish airs—I say, I never heard any one speak of it as worthy of notice. I have been running over the whole hundred airs—of which I have lately sent you the list—and I think Lewie Gordon is most happily adapted to your ode, at least with a very slight alteration of the fourth line, which I shall presently submit to you. Now the variation I have to suggest upon the last line of each verse, the only line too short for the air, is as follows: Verse 1st, Or to *glorious victory*. 2d, *Chains*—chains and slavery. 3d, Let him, *let him* turn and flee. 4th, Let him *brave'y* follow me. 5th, But *they shall*, they shall be

free. 6th, Let us, *let us* do or die." "Glorious" and "bravely," bad as they are, especially "bravely," which is indeed most bitter bad, might have been borne; but just suppose for a moment, that Robert Bruce had, in addressing his army "on the morning of that eventful day," come over again in that odd way every word he uttered, "chains—chains;" "let him—let him;" "they shall—they shall;" "let us—let us;" why the army would have thought him a Bauldy! Action, unquestionably, is the main point in oratory, and Bruce might have imposed on many by the peculiar style in which it is known he handled his battle-axe, but we do not hesitate to assert that had he stuttered in that style, the English would have won the day. Burns winced sorely, but did what he could to accommodate Lewie Gordon.

"The only line," said Mr. T., "which I dislike in the whole of the song is 'Welcome to your gory bed.' Would not another word be preferable to 'welcome?'" Mr. T. proposed "honor's bed;" but Burns replied, "Your idea of 'honor's bed' is, though a beautiful, a hackneyed idea; so if you please we will let the line stand as it is." But Mr. T. was tenacious—"One word more with regard to your heroic ode. I think, with great deference to the poet, that a prudent general would avoid saying anything to his soldiers which might tend to make death more frightful than it is. 'Gory' presents a disagreeable image to the mind; and to tell them, 'Welcome to your gory bed,' seems rather a discouraging address, notwithstanding the alternative which follows. I have shown the song to *three friends of excellent taste*, and each of them objected to this line, which emboldens me to use the freedom of bringing it again under your notice. I would suggest 'Now prepare for honor's bed, or for glorious victory.'" Quoth Burns grimly—"My ode pleases me so much that I cannot alter it. Your proposed alteration would, in my opinion, make it tame. I have scrutinized it over and over again, and to the world some way or other it shall go, as it is." That four Scotsmen, taken *seriatim et separatim*—in the martial ardor of their patriotic souls should object to "Welcome to your gory bed," from an uncommunicated apprehension common to the nature of the n all and operating like an instinct, that it was fitted

to frighten Robert Bruce's army, and make it take to its heels, leaving the cause of Liberty and Independence to shift for itself, is a coincidence that sets at defiance the doctrine of chances, proves history to be indeed an old almanack, and national character an empty name.

“ Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory.

“ Now's the day, and now's the hour;
See the front o' battle lower;
See approach proud Edward's power—
Chains and slavery !

“ Wha will be a traitor knave ?
Wha can fill a coward's grave ?
Wha sae base as be a slave ?
Let him turn and flee !

“ Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Free-man stand, or free-man fa',
Let him on wi' me !

“ By oppression's woes and pains !
By your sons in servile chains !
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be free !

“ Lay the proud usurpers low !
Tyrants fall in every foe !
Liberty's in every blow !
Let us do, or die !”

All Scotsmen at home and abroad swear this is the Grandest Ode out of the Bible. What if it be not an Ode at all ? An Ode, however, let it be ; then, wherein lies the power it possesses of stirring up into a devouring fire the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* ? The two armies suddenly stand before us in order of battle—and in the grim repose preceding the tempest we hear but the voice of Bruce. The whole Scottish army hears it—now standing on their feet—risen from their knees as the abbot

of Inchchaffray had blessed them and the Banner of Scotland with its roots of Stone. At the first six words a hollow murmur is in that wood of spears. "Welcome to your gory bed!" a shout that shakes the sky. Hush! hear the King. At *Edward's* name what a yell! "Wha will be a traitor knave?" Muttering thunder growls reply. The inspired Host in each appeal anticipates the Leader—yet shudders with fresh wrath, as if each reminded it of some intolerable wrong. "Let us do or die"—the English are overthrown—and Scotland is free.

That is a very Scottish critique indeed—but none the worse for that; so our English friends must forgive it, and be consoled by Flodden. The Ode is sublime. Death and Life at that hour are one and the same to the heroes. So that Scotland but survive, what is breath or blood to them? Their being is in their country's liberty, and with it secured they will live for ever.

Our critique is getting more and more Scottish still; so to rid ourselves of nationality, we request such of you as think we overlaud the Ode to point out one word in it that would be better away. You cannot. Then pray have the goodness to point out one word missing that ought to have been there—please to insert a desiderated stanza. You cannot. Then let the bands of all the Scottish regiments play "Hey tuittie taitie;" and the two Dun-Edins salute one another with a salvo that shall startle the echoes from Berwick-Law to Benmore.

Of the delight with which Burns labored for Mr. Thomson's Collection, his letters contain some lively description. "You cannot imagine," says he, 7th April, 1793, "how much this business has added to my enjoyment. What with my early attachment to ballads, your book and ballad-making are now as completely my hobby as ever fortification was my uncle Toby's; so I'll e'en canter it away till I come to the limit of my race (God grant I may take the right side of the winning post), and then, cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have been happy, I shall say or sing, 'Sae merry as we a' hae been,' and raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of Coila shall be, 'Good night and joy be with you a'!'" James Gray was the first, who independently

of every other argument, proved the impossibility of the charges that had too long been suffered to circulate without refutation against Burns's character and conduct during his later years, by pointing to these almost daily effusions of his clear and unclouded genius. His innumerable Letters furnish the same best proof; and when we consider how much of his time was occupied by his professional duties, how much by perpetual interruption of visitors from all lands, how much by blameless social intercourse with all classes in Dumfries and its neighborhood, and how frequently he suffered under constitutional ailments affecting the very seat and source of life, we cannot help despising the unreflecting credulity of his biographers who with such *products* before their eyes, such a display of feeling, fancy, imagination and intellect continually alive and on the alert, could keep one after another for twenty years in doleful dissertations deploring over his *habits*—most of them at the close of their wearisome moralizing anxious to huddle all up, that his countrymen might not be obliged to turn away their faces in shame from the last scene in the Tragedy of the Life of Robert Burns.

During the four years Burns lived in Dumfries he was never known for one hour to be negligent of his professional duties. We are but imperfectly acquainted with the details of the business of a gauger, but the calling must be irksome; and he was an active, steady, correct, courageous officer—to be relied on equally in his conduct and his accounts. Josiah Walker, who was himself, if we mistake not, for a good many years in the Customs or Excise at Perth, will not allow him to have been a good gauger. In descanting on the unfortunate circumstances of his situation, he says with a voice of authority, “his superiors were bound to attend to no qualification, but such as was conducive to the benefit of the revenue; and it would have been equally criminal in them to pardon any incorrectness on account of his literary genius, as on account of his dexterity in ploughing. The merchant or attorney who acts for himself alone, is free to overlook some errors of his clerk, for the sake of merits totally unconnected with business; but the Board of Excise had no power to indulge their poetical taste, or their tenderness for

him by whom it had been gratified, at the expense of the public. Burns was therefore in a place where he could turn his peculiar endowments to little advantage; and where he could not, without injustice, be preferred to the most obtuse and uninteresting of his brethren, who surpassed him in the humble recommendation of exactness, vigilance, and sobriety. Attention to these circumstances might have prevented insinuations against the liberality of his superior officers, for showing so little desire to advance him, and so little indulgence to those eccentricities for which the natural temperament of genius could be pleaded. For two years, however, Burns stood sufficiently high in the opinion of the Board, and it is surely by no means improper, that where professional pretensions are nearly balanced, the additional claims of literary talent should be permitted to turn the scale. Such was the reasoning of a particular member of the Board, whose taste and munificence were of corresponding extent, and who saw no injustice in giving some preference to an officer who could write permits as well as any other, and poems much better." Not for worlds would we say a single syllable derogatory from the merits of the Board of Excise. We respect the character of the defunct; and did we not, still we should have the most delicate regard to the feelings of its descendants, many of whom are probably now prosperous gentlemen. It was a Board that richly deserved, in all its dealings, the utmost eulogies with which the genius and gratitude of Josiah Walker could brighten its green cloth. Most criminal indeed would it have been in such a Board—most wicked and most sinful—"to pardon any incorrectness on account of Burns's literary genius, as on account of his dexterity in ploughing." Deeply impressed with a sense—approaching to that of awe—of the responsibility of the Board to its conscience and its country, we feel that it is better late than never, thus to declare before the whole world, A. D. 1840, that from winter 1791 to summer 1796, the "Board had no power to indulge their poetical taste, or their tenderness for him by whom it had been gratified, at the expense of the public." The Board, we doubt not, had a true innate poetical taste, and must have derived a far higher and deeper delight from the poems than the permits of Burns; nay, we are

willing to believe that it was itself the author of a volume of poetry, and editor of a literary journal.

But surpassing even Josiah Walker in our veneration of the Board, we ask, what has all this to do with the character of Burns? Its desire and its impotency to promote him are granted; but of what incorrectness had Burns been guilty, which it would have been criminal in the Board to pardon? By whom, among the "most obtuse and uninteresting of his brethren," had he been surpassed "in the humble recommendation of exactness, vigilance, and sobriety?" Not by a single one. Mr. Findlater, who was Burns's supervisor from his admission into the Excise, *and sat by him the night before he died*, says, "In all that time, the superintendence of his behavior, as an officer of the revenue, was a part of my official province, and it may be supposed I would not be an inattentive observer of the general conduct of a man and a poet so celebrated by his countrymen. In the former capacity he was exemplary in his attention, and was even jealous of the least imputation on his vigilance. * * * It was not till near the latter end of his days, that there was any falling off in this respect, and this was amply accounted for in the pressure of disease and accumulating infirmities. I will farther avow, that I never saw him—which was very frequently while he lived at Ellisland—and still more so, almost every day, after he removed to Dumfries, but in hours of business he was quite himself, and capable of discharging the duties of his office; nor was he ever known to drink by himself, or ever to indulge in the use of liquor on a forenoon. I have seen Burns in all his various phases—in his convivial moments, in his sober moods, and in the bosom of his family; indeed, I believe that I saw more of him than any other individual had occasion to see, after he became an excise officer, and I never beheld anything like the gross enormities with which he is now charged. That when set down on an evening with a few friends whom he liked, he was apt to prolong the social hour beyond the bounds which prudence would dictate, is unquestionable; but in his family I will venture to say he was never otherwise than as attentive and affectionate to a high degree." Such is the testi-

mony of the supervisor respecting the gauger ; and in that capacity Burns stands up one of its very best servants before the Board. There was no call, therefore, for Josiah's Jeremiad. But our words have not been wasted ; for Burns's character has suffered far more from such aspersions as these, which, easily as they can be wiped away, were too long left as admitted stains on his memory, than from definite and direct charges of specific facts ; and it is still the duty of every man who writes about him, to apply the sponge. Nothing, we repeat, shall tempt us to blame or abuse the Board. But we venture humbly to confess that we do not clearly see that the Board would have been "gratifying its tenderness at the expense of the public," had it, when told by Burns that he was dying, and disabled by the hand of God from performing actively the duties of his temporary supervisorship, requested *its maker* to continue to him for a few months his full salary—seventy pounds a year—instead of reducing it in the proportion of one-half—not because he was a genius, a poet, and the author of many immortal productions—but merely because he was a man and an exciseman, and moreover the father of a few mortal children, who with their mother were in want of bread.

Gray, whom we knew well and highly esteemed, was a very superior man to honest Findlater—a man of poetical taste and feeling, and a scholar—on all accounts well entitled to speak of the character of Burns ; and though there were no bounds to his enthusiasm when poets and poetry were the themes of his discourse, he was a worshipper of truth, and rightly believed that it was best seen in the light of love and admiration. Compare his bold, generous, and impassioned eulogy on the noble qualities and dispositions of his illustrious friend, with the timid, guarded, and repressed praise for ever bordering on censure, of biographers who never saw the poet's face, and yet have dared to draw his character with the same assurance of certainty in their delineations as if they had been of the number of his familiars, and had looked a thousand times, by night and day, into the saddest secrets of his heart. Far better, surely, in a world like this, to do more rather than less than justice to the goodness of great men. No fear that the world, in its final

judgment, will not make sufficient deduction from the laud, if it be exaggerated, which love, inspired by admiration and pity, delights to bestow, as the sole tribute now in its power, on the virtues of departed genius. Calumny may last for ages—we had almost said for ever; lies have life even in their graves, and centuries after they have been interred they will burst their cerements, and walk up and down, in the face of day, undistinguishable to the weak eyes of mortals from truths—till they touch; and then the truths expand, and the lies shrivel up, but after a season to reappear, and to be welcomed back again by the dwellers in this delusive world.

“He was courted,” says Gray, “by all classes of men for the fascinating powers of his conversation, but over his social scene uncontrolled passion never presided. Over the social bowl, his wit flashed for hours together, penetrating whatever it struck, like the fire from heaven; but even in the hour of thoughtless gaiety and merriment I never knew it tainted by indecency. It was playful or caustic by turns, following an allusion through all its windings; astonishing by its rapidity, or amusing by its wild originality and grotesque yet natural combinations, but never, within my observation, disgusting by its grossness. In his morning hours, I never saw him like one suffering from the effects of last night’s intemperance. He appeared then clear and unclouded. He was the eloquent advocate of humanity, justice, and political freedom. From his paintings, virtue appeared more lovely, and piety assumed a more celestial mien. While his keen eye was pregnant with fancy and feeling, and his voice attuned to the very passion which he wished to communicate, it would hardly have been possible to conceive any being more interesting and delightful. * * * The men with whom he generally associated, were not of the lowest order. He numbered among his intimate friends, many of the most respectable inhabitants of Dumfries and the vicinity. Several of those were attached to him by ties that the hand of calumny, busy as it was, could never snap asunder. They admired the poet for his genius, and loved the man for the candor, generosity, and kindness of his nature. His early friends clung to him through good and bad report, with a zeal and fidelity that prove their

disbelief of the malicious stories circulated to his disadvantage. Among them were some of the most distinguished characters in this country and not a few females, eminent for delicacy, taste, and genius. They were proud of his friendship, and cherished him to the last moment of his existence. He was endeared to them even by his misfortunes, and they still retain for his memory that affectionate veneration which virtue alone inspires."

Gray tells us too that it came under his own view professionally, that Burns superintended the education of his children—and promising children they were, nor has that promise been disappointed—with a degree of care that he had never known surpassed by any parent whatever; that to see him in the happiest light you had to see him, as he often did, in his own house, and that nothing could exceed the mutual affection between husband and wife in that lowly tenement. Yet of this man, Josiah Walker, who claims to have been his friend as well as James Gray, writes, "soured by disappointment, and stung with occasional remorse, *impatient of finding little to interest him at home,* and rendered inconstant from returns of his hypochondriacal ailment, multiplied by his irregular life, he saw the difficulty of keeping terms with the world; *and abandoned the attempt in a rash and regardless despair!*"

It may be thought by some that we have referred too frequently to Walker's Memoir, perhaps that we have spoken of it with too much asperity, and that so respectable a person merited tenderer treatment at our hands. He was a respectable person, and for that very reason, we hope by our strictures to set him aside for ever as a biographer of Burns. He had been occasionally in company with the Poet in Edinburgh, in 1787, and had seen him during his short visit at Athol house. "Circumstances led him to Scotland in November, 1795, after an absence of eight years, and he felt strongly prompted" to visit his old friend; for your common-place man immediately becomes hand in glove with your man of genius, to whom he has introduced himself, and ever after the first interview designates him by that flattering appellation "my friend." "For this purpose I went to Dumfries, and called upon him early in the forenoon. I found him in a small house of one story. He was sitting in a win-

dow-seat reading with the doors open, and the family arrangements going on in his presence, and altogether without that snugness and seclusion which a student requires. After conversing with him for some time, he proposed a walk, and promised to conduct me through some of his favorite haunts. We accordingly quitted the town, and wandered a considerable way up the beautiful banks of the Nith. Here he gave me an account of his latest productions, and repeated some satirical ballads which he had composed, to favor one of the Candidates at last election. These I thought inferior to his other pieces, though they had some lines in which dignity compensated for coarseness. He repeated also his fragment of an *Ode to Liberty*, with marked and peculiar energy, and showed a disposition which, however, was easily repressed, to throw out political remarks, of the same nature with those for which he had been reprehended. On finishing our walk, he passed some time with me at the inn, and I left him early in the evening, to make another visit at some distance from Dumfries. On the second morning after I returned with a friend—who was acquainted with the poet—and we found him ready to pass a part of the day with us at the inn. On this occasion I did not think him quite so interesting as he had appeared at the outset. His conversation was too elaborate, and his expression weakened by a frequent endeavor to give it artificial strength. He had been accustomed to speak for applause in the circles which he frequented, and seemed to think it necessary, in making the most common remark, to depart a little from the ordinary simplicity of language, and to couch it in something of epigrammatic point. In his praise and censure he was so decisive, as to render a dissent from his judgment difficult to be reconciled with the laws of good breeding. His wit was not more licentious than is unhappily too venial in higher circles, though I thought him rather unnecessarily free in the avowal of his excesses. Such were the clouds by which the pleasures of the evening were partially shaded, but coruscations of genius were visible between them. When it began to grow late, he showed no disposition to retire, but called for fresh supplies of liquor with a freedom which might be excusable, as we were in an inn, and no condition had been distinctly made,

though it might easily have been inferred, had the inference been welcome, that he was to consider himself as our guest ; nor was it till he saw us worn out, that he departed about three in the morning with a reluctance, which probably proceeded less from being deprived of our company, than from being confined to his own. Upon the whole, I found this last interview not quite so gratifying as I had expected ; although I discovered in his conduct no errors which I had not seen in men who stand high in the favor of society, or sufficient to account for the mysterious insinuations which I heard against his character. He on this occasion drank freely without being intoxicated—a circumstance from which I concluded, not only that his constitution was still unbroken, but that he was not addicted to solitary cordials ; for if he had tasted liquor in the morning, he must have easily yielded to the excess of the evening. He did not, however, always escape so well. About two months after, returning at the same unseasonable hour from a similar revel, in which he was probably better supported by his companions, he was so much disordered as to occasion a considerable delay in getting home, where he arrived with the chill of cold without, and inebriety within,” &c.

And for this the devotee had made what is called “a pilgrimage to the shrine of genius” as far as Dumfries ! Is this the spirit in which people with strong propensities for poetry are privileged to write of poets, long after they have been gathered to their rest ? No tenderness—no pity—no respect—no admiration—no gratitude—no softening of heart—no kindling of spirit—on recollection of his final farewell to Robert Burns ! If the interview had not been satisfactory, he was bound in friendship to have left no record of it. Silence in that case was a duty especially incumbent on him who had known Burns in happier times, when “Dukes, and Lords, and mighty Earls” were proud to receive the ploughman. He might not know it then, but he knew it soon afterwards, that Burns was much broken down in body and spirit.

Those two days should have worn to him in retrospect a mournful complexion ; and the more so, that he believed Burns to have been then a ruined man in character, which he had once

prized above life. He calls upon him early in the forenoon, and finds him "in a small house of one story (it happened to have two), on a window-seat reading, with the doors open, and the family arrangements going on in his presence." After eight years' absence from Scotland, did not his heart leap at the sight of her greatest son sitting thus happy in his own humble household? Twenty years after, did not his heart melt at the rising up of the sanctified image? No—for the room was "altogether *without that appearance of snugness* and seclusion which a student requires!" The poet conducted him through some of his beautiful haunts, and for his amusement let off some of his electioneering squibs, which are among the very best ever composed, and Whiggish as they are, might have tickled a Tory as they jogged along; but Jos thought them "inferior to his other pieces," and so no doubt they were to the "Cottar's Saturday Night," and "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled." Perhaps they walked as far as Lincluden—and the bard repeated his famous fragment of an "Ode to Liberty"—with "marked and peculiar energy." The listener ought to have lost his wits, and to have leapt sky-high. But he who was destined to "The Defence of Order," felt himself called by the voice that sent him on that mission, to rebuke the bard on the banks of his own river—for "he showed a disposition which, however, was easily repressed, to throw out political remarks, of the same nature with those for which he had been reprehended," three years before by the Board of Excise! Mr. Walker was not a Commissioner. Burns, it is true, had been told "not to think;" but here was a favorable opportunity for violating with safety that imperial mandate. Woods have ears, but in their whispers they betray no secrets—had Burns talked treason, 'twould have been pity to stop his tongue. This world is yet rather in the dark as to "the political remarks for which he had been reprehended," and as he "threw out some of the same nature," why was the world allowed to remain unenlightened? What right had Josiah Walker to repress any remarks made, in the confidence of friendship, by Robert Burns? And what power? Had Burns chosen it, he could as easily have *squabashed* Josiah as thrown him into the Nith. He was not to

be put down by fifty such ; he may have refrained, but he was not repressed, and in courtesy to his companion, treated him with an old wife's song.

The record of the second day is shameful. To ask any person, however insignificant, to your inn, and then find fault with him in a private letter for keeping you out of bed, would not be gentlemanly ; but of such an offence twenty years after his death publicly to accuse Burns ! No mention is made of dinner—and we shrewdly suspect Burns dined at home. However, he gave up two days to the service of his friend, and his friend's friend, and such was his reward. Why did not this dignified personage “repress” Burns's licentious wit as well as his political opinions ? If it was “not more licentious than is unhappily too venial in higher circles,” why mention it at all ? What were “the excesses” of which he was unnecessarily free in the avowal ? They could not have regarded unlawful intercourse with the sex—for “they were not sufficient to account for the mysterious insinuations against his character,” all of which related to women. Yet this wretched mixture of meanness, worldliness, and morality, interlarded with some liberal sentiment, and spiced with spite, absolutely seems intended for a vindication !

There are generally two ways at least of telling the same story ; and 'tis pity we have not Burns's own account of that long *seederunt*. It is clear that before midnight he had made the discovery that his right and his left hand assessor were a couple of solemn blockheads, and that to relieve the tedium, he kept plying them with all manner of *bams*. Both gentlemen were probably in black, and though laymen, decorous as deacons on religion and morality—and defenders of the faith—sententious champions of Church and State. It must have been amusing to see them gape. Nobody ever denied that Burns always conducted himself with the utmost propriety in presence of those whom he respected for their genius, their learning, or their worth. Without sacrificing an atom of his independence, how deferential, nay, how reverential was he in his behavior to Dugald Stewart ! Had *he* and Dr. Blair entertained Burns as their guest in that inn, how delightful had been the evening's record ! No such “licentious wit as is unhappily too venial in higher circles,”

would have flowed from his lips—no “unnecessarily free avowal of his excesses.” He would have delighted the philosopher and the divine with his noble sentiments as he had done of old—the illustrious Professor would have remembered and heard again the beautiful eloquence that charmed him on the Braid-hills. There can be nothing unfair surely in the conjecture, that these gentlemen occasionally contributed a sentence or two to the stock of conversation. They were *entertaining* Burns, and good manners must have induced them now and then “here to interpose” with a small smart remark—sentiment facete—or unctuous anecdote. Having lived in “higher circles,” and heard much of the “licentious wit unhappily too venial there,” we do not well see how they could have avoided giving their guest a few specimens of it. Grave men are often gross—and they were both grave as ever was earthenware. Such wit is the most contagious of any; and “budge doctors of the Stoic fur” then express “Fancies” that are anything but “Chaste and Noble.” Who knows but that they were driven into indecency by the desperation of self-defence—took refuge in repartee—and fought the gauger with his own rod? That Burns, in the dead silence that ever and anon occurred, should have called for “fresh supplies of liquor,” is nothing extraordinary. For there is not in nature or in art a sadder spectacle than an empty bottle standing in the centre of a circle, equidistant from three friends, one of whom had returned to his native land after a yearning absence of eight years, another anonymous, and the third the author of Scotch Drink and the Earnest Cry. Josiah more than insinuates that he himself shy’d the bottle. We more than doubt it—we believe that for some hours he turned up his little finger as frequently as Burns. He did right to desist as soon as he had got his dose, and of that he was not only the best but the only judge; he appears to have been sewn up “when it began to grow late;” Burns was sober as a lark “about three in the morning.” It is likely enough that “about two months after, Burns was better supported by his companions at a *similar revel*”—so much better indeed in every way that the *revel was dissimilar*; but still we cling to our first belief, that the two gentlemen in black drank as much as could have been rea-

sonably expected of them—that is, as much as they could hold—had they attempted more, there is no saying what might have been the consequences. And we still continue to think, too, that none but a heartless man, or a man whose heart had been puffed up like a bladder with vanity, would have tagged to the tail of his pitiful tale of that night, that cruel statement of “cold without, and inebriety within,” which was but the tittle-tattle of gossiping tradition, and most probably a lie.

This is the proper way to treat all such *memorabilia*—with the ridicule of contempt and scorn. Refute falsehood first, and then lash the fools that utter it. Much of the obloquy that so long rested on the memory of our great National Poet originated in frivolous hearsays of his life and conversation, which in every telling lost some portion of whatever truth might have belonged to them, and acquired at least an equal portion of falsehood, till they became unmixed calumnies—many of them of the blackest kind—got into print, which is implicitly believed by the million—till the simple story, which, as first told, had illustrated some interesting trait of his character or genius, as last told, redounded to his disgrace, and was listened to by the totally abstinent with uplifted eyes, hands, and shoulders, as an anecdote of the dreadful debaucheries of Robert Burns.

That he did sometimes associate, while in Edinburgh, with persons not altogether worthy of him, need not be denied, nor wondered at, for it was inevitable. He was not for ever beset with the consciousness of his own supereminence. Prudence he did not despise, and he has said some strong things in her praise; but she was not, in his system of morality, the Queen of Virtues. His genius, so far from separating him from any portion of his kind, impelled him towards humanity, without fear and without suspicion. No saint or prude was he to shun the society of “Jolly companions every one.” Though never addicted to drinking, he had often set the table in a roar at Tarbolton, Mauchline, Kirkoswald, Irvine and Ayr, and was he all at once to appear in the character of dry Quaker in Edinburgh? Were the joys that circle round the flowing bowl to be interdicted to him alone, the wittiest, the brightest, the most original, and the most eloquent of all the men of his day? At

Ellisland we know for certain, that his domestic life was temperate and sober ; and that beyond his own doors, his convivialities among "gentle and simple," though not unfrequent were not excessive, and left his character without any of those deeper stains with which it has been since said to have been sullied. It is for ever to be lamented that he was more dissipated at Dumfries—how much more—and under what stronger temptations, can be told in not many words. But every glass of wine "or stouter cheer" he drank—like mere ordinary men too fond of the festive hour—seems to have been set down against him as a separate sin ; and the world of fashion, and of philosophy too, we fear, both of which used him rather scurvily at last, would not be satisfied unless Burns could be made out—a drunkard ! Had he not been such a wonderful man in conversation, he might have enjoyed unhurt the fame of his poetry. But what was reading his poetry, full as it is of mirth and pathos, to hearing the Poet ! When all were desirous of the company of a man of such genius and such dispositions, was it in human nature to be always judicious in the selection or rejection of associates ? His deepest and best feelings he for the most part kept sacred for communion with those who were held by him in honor as well as love. But few were utterly excluded from the cordiality of one who, in the largeness of his heart, could sympathize with all, provided he could but bring out by the stroke of the keen-tempered steel of his own nature, some latent spark of humanity from the flint of theirs ; and it is easy to see with what dangers he thus must have been surrounded, when his genius and humor, his mirth and glee, his fun and frolic, and all the outrageous merriment of his exhilarated or maddened imagination came to be considered almost as common property by all who chose to introduce themselves to Robert Burns, and thought themselves entitled to do so because they could prove they had his poems by heart. They sent for the gauger, and the gauger came. A prouder man breathed not, but he had never been subjected to the ceremonial of manners, the rule of artificial life ; and he was ready, at all times, to grasp the hand held out in friendship, to go when a message said come, for he knew

that his "low-roof'd house" was honored because by his genius he had greatly glorified his people.

We have seen, from one characteristic instance, how shamefully his condescension must often have been abused; and no doubt but that sometimes he behaved imprudently in such parties, and incurred the blame of intemperance. Frequently must he have joined them with a heavy heart! How little did many not among the worst of those who stupidly stared at the "wondrous guest" understand of his real character! How often must they have required mirth from him in his melancholy, delight in his despair! The coarse buffoon ambitious to show off before the author of "*Tam o' Shanter*" and "*The Holy Friar*"—how could it enter into his fat heart to conceive, in the midst of his own roaring ribaldry, that the fire-eyed son of genius was a hypochondriac, sick of life! Why such a fellow would think nothing next morning of impudently telling his cronies that on the whole he had been disappointed in the Poet. Or in another key, forgetting that the Poet who continued to sit late at a tavern table, need own no relationship but that of time and place with the prosier who was lying resignedly under it, the drunkard boasts all over the city of the glorious night he had had with BURNS.

But of the multitudes who thus sought the society of Burns, there must have been many in every way qualified to enjoy it. His fame had crossed the Tweed; and though a knowledge of his poetry could not then have been prevalent over England, he had ardent admirers among the most cultivated classes, before whose eyes, shadowed in a language but imperfectly understood, had dawned a new and beautiful world of rustic life. Young men of generous birth, and among such lovers of genius some doubtless themselves endowed with the precious gift, acquainted with the clod-hoppers of their own country, longed to behold the prodigy who had stalked between the stilts of the plough in moods of tenderest or loftiest inspiration; and it is pleasing to think that the poet was not seldom made happy by such visitors—that they carried back with them to their own noblest land a still deeper impression of the exalted worth of the genius of Caledonia. Nor did the gold coin of the genius of

Burns sustain any depreciation during his lifetime in his own country. He had that to comfort him—that to glory in till the last; and in his sorest poverty, it must have been his exceeding great reward. Ebenezer Elliot has nobly expressed that belief—and coupled with it—as we have often done—the best vindication of Scotland—

“BUT SHALL IT OF OUR SIRES BE TOLD
 THAT THEY THEIR BROTHER POOR FORSOOK?
 NO! FOR THEY GAVE HIM MORE THAN GOLD;
 THEY READ THE BRAVE MAN’S BOOK.”

What happens during their life, more or less, to all eminent men, happened to Burns. Thinking on such things, one sometimes cannot help believing that man hates to honor man, till the power in which miracles have been wrought is extinguished or withdrawn; and then, when jealousy, envy, and all uncharitableness of necessity cease, we confess its grandeur, bow down to it, and worship it. But who were they who in his own country continued most steadfastly to honor his genius and himself, all through what have been called, truly in some respects, falsely in others, his dark days in Dumfries, and on to his death? Not Lords and Earls, not lawyers and wits, not philosophers and doctors, though among the nobility and gentry, among the classes of leisure and of learning, he had friends who wished him well, and were not indisposed to serve him; not the male generation of critics, not the literary prigs epicene, not of decided sex the blues celestial, though many periods were rounded among them upon the Ayrshire ploughman; but the MEN OF HIS OWN ORDER, with their wives and daughters—shepherds, and herdsmen, and ploughmen, delvers and ditchers, hewers of wood and drawers of water, soldiers and sailors, whether regulars, militia, fencibles, volunteers, on board king’s or merchant’s ship “far, far at sea” or dirt gabbert—within a few yards of the land on either side of the Clyde or the Cart—the WORKING PEOPLE, whatever the instruments of their toil, they patronized Burns then, they patronize him now, they would not have hurt a hair of his head, they will not hear of any dishonor to his dust, they know well what it is to endure, to

yield, to enjoy, and to suffer, and the memory of their own bard will be hallowed for ever among the brotherhood like a religion.

In Dumfries—as in every other considerable town in Scotland—and we might add England—it was then customary, you know, with the respectable inhabitants, to pass a convivial hour or two of an evening in some decent tavern or other—and Burns's *howf* was the Globe, kept by honest Mrs. Hyslop, who had a sonsie sister, “Anna wi’ the gowden locks,” the heroine of what in his fond deceit he thought was the best of all his songs. The worthy towns-folk did not frequent bar, or parlor, or club-room—at least they did not think they did—from a desire for drink; though doubtless they often took a glass more than they intended, nay, sometimes even two; and the prevalence of such a system of social life, for it was no less, must have given rise, with others besides the predisposed, to very hurtful habits. They met to expatiate and confer on state affairs—to read the newspapers—to talk a little scandal—and so forth—and the result was, we have been told, considerable dissipation. The system was not excellent; dangerous to a man whose face was always more than welcome; without whom there was wanting the evening or the morning star. Burns latterly indulged too much in such computations, and sometimes drank more than was good for him; *but not a man now alive in Dumfries ever saw him intoxicated*; and the survivors all unite in declaring that he cared not whether the stoup were full or empty, so that there were *conversation*—argumentative or declamatory, narrative or anecdotal, grave or gay, satirical or sermonic; nor would any of them have hoped to see the sun rise again in this world, had Burns portentously fallen asleep. They had much better been, one and all of them, even on the soberest nights, at their own firesides, or in their beds, and orgies that seemed moderation itself in a *howf*, would have been felt outrageous in a *home*. But the blame, whatever be its amount, must not be heaped on the head of Burns, while not a syllable has ever been said of the same enormities steadily practised for a series of years by the dignitaries of the borough, who by themselves and friends were opined to have been from youth upwards among the most sober of the children of Adam. Does anybody suppose that Burns

would have addicted himself to any meetings considered disreputable—or that, had he lived now, he would have *frequented* any tavern, except, perhaps, some not unfavored one in the airy realms of imagination, and built among the clouds?

Malicious people would not have ventured during his lifetime, in underhand and undertoned insinuations, to whisper away Burns's moral character, nor would certain memorialists have been so lavish of their lamentations and regrets over his evil habits, had not his political principles during his later years been such as to render him with many an object of suspicion equivalent, in troubled times, to fear and hatred. A revolution that shook the foundations on which so many old evils and abuses rested, and promised to restore to millions their natural liberties, and by that restoration to benefit all mankind, must have agitated his imagination to a pitch of enthusiasm far beyond the reach of ordinary minds to conceive, who nevertheless thought it no presumption on their part to decide dogmatically on the highest questions in political science, the solution of which, issuing in terrible practice, had upset one of the most ancient, and as it had been thought, one of the firmest of thrones. No wonder that with his eager and earnest spirit for ever on his lips, he came to be reputed a Democrat. Dumfries was a Tory Town, and could not tolerate a revolutionary—the term was not in use then—a Radical Exciseman. And to say the truth, the idea must have been not a little alarming to weak nerves, of Burns as a demagogue. With such eyes and such a tongue he would have proved a formidable Man of the People. It is certain that he spoke and wrote rashly and reprehensibly—and deserved a caution from the Board. But not such tyrannical reproof; and perhaps it was about as absurd in the Board to order Burns not to think, as it would have been in him to order it to think, for thinking comes of nature, and not of institution, and 'tis about as difficult to control as to create it. He defended himself boldly, and like a man conscious of harboring in his bosom no evil wish to the State. "In my defence to their accusations I said, that whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain I abjured the idea; that a constitution, which in its original principles, experience had proved to be in

every way fitted for our happiness in society, it would be insanity to sacrifice to an untried visionary theory ;—that in consideration of my being situated in a department, however humble, immediately in the hands of people in power, I had forborne taking an active part, either personally, or as an author, in the present business of reform ; but that when I must declare my sentiments, I would say there existed a system of corruption between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature which boded no good to our glorious constitution, and which every patriotic Briton must wish to see amended.” His biographers have had difficulty in forming their opinion as to the effect on Burns’s mind of the expression of the Board’s sovereign will and displeasure. Scott, without due consideration, thought it so preyed on his peace as to render him desperate—and has said “ that from the moment his hopes of promotion were utterly blasted, his tendency to dissipation hurried him precipitately into those excesses which shortened his life.” Lockhart, on the authority of Mr. Findlater, dissents from that statement ; Allan Cuninghame thinks it in essentials true, and that Burns’s letter to Erskine of Mar, “ covers the Board of Excise and the British Government of that day with eternal shame.” Whatever may have been the effect of those proceedings on Burns’s mind, it is certain that the freedom with which he gave utterance to his political opinions and sentiments seriously injured him in the estimation of multitudes of excellent people who thought them akin to doctrines subversive of all government but that of the mob. Nor till he joined the Dumfries Volunteers, and as their Laureate issued his popular song, that flew over the land like wild-fire, “ Does haughty Gaul invasion threat ?” was he generally regarded as a loyal subject. For two or three years he had been looked on with evil eyes, and spoken of in evil whispers by too many of the good, and he had himself in no small measure to blame for their false judgment of his character. Here are a few of his lines to “ The Tree of Liberty :”

“ But vicious folk aye hate to see
The works of virtue thrive, man ;
The courtly vermin bann’d the tree,
And grat to see it thrive, man.

King Louis thought to cut it down,
 When it was unco sma', man;
 For this the watchman crack'd his crown,
 Cut aff his head and a', man.

“ Let Britain boast her hardy oak,
 Her poplar and her pine, man,
 Auld Britain ance could crack her joke,
 And o'er her neighbor shine, man.
 But seek the forest round and round,
 And soon 't will be agreed, man,
 That sic a tree cannot be found
 'Twixt London and the Tweed, man.

“ Wae worth the loon wha woudna eat
 Sic wholesome dainty cheer, man;
 I'd sell my shoon frae aff my feet
 To taste sic fruit I swear, man.
 Syne let us pray, auld England may
 Soon plant this far-fam'd tree, man;
 And blithe we'll sing, and hail the day
 That gave us liberty, man.”

So sunk in slavery at this time was Scotland, that England could not sleep in her bed till she had set her sister free—and sent down some liberators who narrowly escaped getting hanged by this most ungrateful country. Such “perilous stuff” as the above might have been indited by Palmer, Gerald, or Margatrot—how all unworthy of the noble Burns? Of all men then in the world, the author of “The Cottar's Saturday Night” was by nature the least of a Jacobin. We cannot help thinking that, like Byron, he loved at times to astonish dull people by daring things, to see how they looked with their hair on end; and dull people—who are not seldom malignant—taking him at his word, had their revenge in charging him with all manner of profligacy, and fabricating vile stories to his disgrace; there being nothing too gross for the swallow of political rancor.

It is proved by many very strong expressions in his correspondence—that the reproof he received from the Board of Excise sorely troubled him; and no doubt it had an evil influence on public opinion that did not subside till it was feared he was dying, and that ceased for a time only with his death. We have

expressed our indignation—our contempt of that tyrannical treatment ; and have not withheld our respect—our admiration from the characteristic manliness with which he repelled the accusations some insidious enemies had secretly sent in to the quarter where they knew fatal injury might be done to all his prospects in life. But was it possible that his most unguarded, rash, and we do not for a moment hesitate to say, blameable expression of political opinions adverse to those maintained by all men friendly to the government, could be permitted to pass without notice ? He had no right to encourage what the government sought to put down, while he was “their servant in a very humble department ;” and though he successfully repelled the slanders of the despicable creatures who strove to destroy him, even in his high-spirited letter to Erskine there is enough to show that he had entered into such an expostulation with the Board as must have excited strong displeasure and disapproval, which no person of sense, looking back on those most dangerous times, can either wonder at or blame. He says in his defence before the Board, “I stated that, where I must declare my sentiments, I would say there existed a system of corruption between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature, which boded no good to our glorious constitution, and which every patriotic Briton must wish to see amended.” From a person in his situation even such a declaration was not prudent, and prudence was a duty ; but it is manifest from what he adds for Erskine’s own ear, that something more lay concealed in those generalities than the mere words seem to imply. “I have three sons, who I see already have brought into the world souls ill qualified to inhabit the bodies of SLAVES. Can I look tamely on, and see any machinations to wrest from them the birthright of my boys—the little independent Britons, in whose veins runs my blood ? No ; I will not, should my heart’s blood stream around my attempt to defend it. Does any man tell me, that my poor efforts can be of no service, and that it does not belong to my humble station to meddle with the concerns of a nation ?” Right or wrong—and we think they were right—the government of the country had resolved to uphold principles, to which the man who could not refrain from thus

fiercely declaring himself, at the very time all that was dearest to him was in peril, could not but be held hostile ; and so far from its being their duty to overlook such opinions, because they were the opinions of Burns, it was just because they were the opinions of Burns that it was their duty to restrain and reprove them. He continued too long after this to be by far too outspoken—as we have seen ; but that his Scottish soul had in aught become Frenchified, we never shall believe, but while we live shall attribute the obstinacy with which he persisted to sing and say the praises of that people, after they had murdered their King and their Queen, and had been guilty of all enormities, in a great measure to a haughtiness that could not brook to retract opinions he had offensively declared before the faces of many whom not without reason he despised—to a horror of the idea of any sacrifice of that independent spirit which was the very life of his life. Burns had been insulted by those who were at once his superiors and his inferiors, and shall Burns truckle to “the powers that be ?” At any bidding but that of his own conviction swerve a hair’s-breadth from his political creed ? No : not even though his reason had told him that some of its articles were based in delusion, and if carried into practice among his own countrymen, pursuant to the plots of traitors, who were indeed aliens in soul to the land he loved, would have led to the destruction of that liberty for which he, by the side or at the head of his cottage compatriots, would have gladly died.

The evil consequences of all this to Burns were worse than you may have imagined, for over and above the lies springing up like puddock-stools from domestic middens, an ephemeral brood indeed, but by succession perennial, and that even now when you grasp them in your hand, spatter vileness in your eyes, like so many devil’s snuff-boxes—think how injurious to the happiness of such a soul as his, to all its natural habitudes, must have been the feuds carried on all around him, and in which he with his commanding powers too largely mingled, between political parties in a provincial town, contending as they thought, the one for hearths and altars, the other for regeneration of those principles, decayed or dead, which alone make hearths and altars sacred,

and their defence worth the tears and the blood of brave men who would fain be free. His sympathy was "wide and general as the casing air;" and not without violence could it be contracted "within the circle none dared tread but they," who thought William Pitt the reproach, and Charles Fox the Paragon of Animals. Within that circle he met with many good men, the Herons, Millers, Riddells, Maxwells, Symes, and so forth; within it too he forgathered with many "a fool and something more." Now up to "the golden exhalation of the dawn" of his gaugership, Burns had been a Tory, and he heard in "the whisper of a faction" a word unpleasing to a Whiggish ear, turncoat. The charge was false, and he disdained it; but disdain in eyes that when kindled up burned like carriage lamps in a dark night, frightened the whispering faction into such animosity, that a more than usual sumph produced an avenging epigram upon him and two other traitors, in which the artist committed a mistake of workmanship no subsequent care could rectify: instead of hitting the right nail on the head, why he hit the wrong nail on the point, so no wooden mallet could drive it home. From how much social pleasure must not Burns have thus been wilfully self-debarred! From how many happy friendships! By nature he was not vindictive, yet occasionally he seemed to be so, visiting slight offence with severe punishment, sometimes imagining offence when there was none, and in a few instances, we fear, satirizing in savage verses not only the innocent, but the virtuous; the very beings whom, had he but known them as he might, he would have loved and revered—celebrated them living or dead in odes, elegies, and hymns—thereby doing holy service to goodness in holding up shining examples to all who longed to do well. Most of his intolerant scorn of high rank had the same origin—not in his own nature, which was noble, but in prejudices thus superinduced upon it which in their virulence were mean—though his genius could clothe them in magnificent diction, and so justify them to the proud poet's heart.

It is seldom indeed that Lockhart misses the mark; but in one instance—an anecdote—where it is intended to present the pathetic, our eyes perceive but the picturesque—we allude to the tale told him by Davie Macculloch, son of the Laird of Ardwall.

“He told me that he was seldom more grieved than when, riding into Dumfries one fine summer’s evening to attend a county ball, he saw Burns walking alone on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite part was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom appeared willing to recognize him. The horseman dismounted and joined Burns, who on his proposing to him to cross the street, said, ‘Nay, my young friend, that is all over now,’ and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizell Baillie’s pathetic ballad beginning, ‘The bonnet stood ance sae fair on his brow,’ and ending ‘*And were na my heart light I wad die.*’ It was little in Burns’s character to let his feelings on certain subjects escape in this fashion. He, immediately after citing these verses, assumed the sprightliness of his most pleasing manner; and taking his young friend home with him, entertained him very agreeably until the hour of the ball arrived, with a bowl of his usual potation, and bonnie Jean’s singing of some verses which he had recently composed.” ’Tis a pretty picture in the style of Watteau. “The opposite part gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night.” What were they about, and where were they going? Were they as yet in their ordinary clothes, colts and fillies alike, taking their exercise preparatory to the country-dances of some thirty or forty couple, that in those days used to try the wind of both sexes? If so, they might have chosen better training-ground along the banks of the Nith. Were they all in full fig, the females with feathers on their heads, the males with chapeaux bas—“stepping westward” arm in arm, in successive groups, to the Assembly-room? In whichever of these two pleasant predicaments they were placed, it showed rare perspicacity in Daintie Davie to discern that not one of them appeared willing to recognize Burns—more especially as he was walking on the other and shady side of the street, and Davie on horseback. By what secret signs did the fair free-masons—for such there be—express to their mounted brother their unwillingness to recognize from the sunshine of their promenade, the gauger walking alone in the shade of his? Was flirtation at so low an

ebb in Dumfries-shire, that the flower of her beaux and belles, “in successive groups, drawn together for the festivities of the night,” could find eyes for a disagreeable object so many yards of causeway remote? And if Burns observed that they gave him the cold shoulder—cut him across the street—on what recondite principle of conduct did he continue to walk there, in place of stalking off with a frown to his *Howf*? And is it high Galloway to propose to a friend to cross the street to do the civil “to successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, not one of whom had appeared willing to recognize him?” However it was gallant under such discouragement to patronize the gauger; and we trust that the “wicked wee bowl,” while it detained from, and disinclined to, did not incapacitate for the Ball.

But whence all those expressions so frequent in his correspondence, and not rare in his poetry, of self-reproach and rueful remorse? From a source that lay deeper than our eyes can reach. We know his worst sins, but cannot know his sorrows. The war between the spirit and the flesh often raged in his nature—as in that of the best of beings who are made—and no Christian, without humblest self-abasement, will ever read his Confessions.

“Is there a whim-inspired fool,
Owre fast for thought, owre hot for rule,
Owre blate to seek, owre proud to snool,
Let him draw near;
And owre this grassy heap sing dool,
And drap a tear.

“Is there a bard of rustic song,
Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,
That weekly this area throng,
O, pass not by!
But with a frater-feeling strong,
Here, heave a sigh.

“Is there a man, whose judgment clear,
Can others teach the course to steer,
Yet runs himself life’s mad career,
Wild as the wave;

Here pause—and, thro' the starting tear,
Survey this grave.

“The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn, and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow,
And softer flame ;
But thoughtless follies laid him low,
And stain'd his name !

“Reader, attend—whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole,
In low pursuit ;
Know, prudent, cautious, self-control,
Is wisdom's root.”

A Bard's Epitaph ! Such his character drawn by himself in deepest despondency—in distraction—in despair calmed while he was composing it by the tranquillizing power that ever accompanies the action of genius. And shall we judge him as severely as he judged himself, and think worse of him than of common men, because he has immortalized his frailties in his contrition ? The sins of common men are not remembered in their epitaphs. Silence is a privilege of the grave few seek to disturb. If there must be no eulogium, our name and age suffice for that stone—and whatever may have been thought of us, there are some to drop a tear on our “forlorn hic jacet.” Burns wrote those lines in the very prime of youthful manhood. You know what produced them—his miserable attachment to her who became his wife. He was then indeed most miserable—afterwards most happy ; he cared not then though he should die—all his other offences rose against him in that agony ; and how humbly he speaks of his high endowments, under a sense of the sins by which they had been debased ! He repented, and sinned again and again ; for his repentance—though sincere—was not permanent ; yet who shall say that it was not accepted at last ? “Owre this grassy heap sing dool, and drap a tear,” is an injunction that has been obeyed by many a pitying heart. Yet a little while, and his Jean buried him in such a grave. A few years more, and a mausoleum was erected by the nation for

his honored dust. Now husband and wife lie side by side—"in hopes of a joyful resurrection."

Burns belonged to that order of prevailing poets, with whom "all thoughts, all passions, all delights" possess not that entire satisfaction nature intends, till they effuse themselves abroad, for sake of the sympathy that binds them, even in uttermost solitude, to the brotherhood of man. No secrets have they that words can reveal. They desire that the whole race shall see their very souls—shall hear the very beatings of their hearts. Thus they hope to live for ever in kindred bosoms. They feel that a greater power is given them in their miseries—for what miseries has any man ever harbored in the recesses of his spirit, that he has not shared, and will share, with "numbers without number numberless" till the Judgment Day!

Who reads unmoved such sentences as these? "The fates and characters of the rhyming tribe often employ my thoughts when I am disposed to be melancholy. There is not, among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so woeful a narrative as the lives of the Poets. In the comparative view of wretches, the question is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear!" Long before the light of heaven had ever been darkened or obscured in his conscience by evil thoughts or evil deeds, when the bold bright boy, with his thick black clustering hair ennobling his ample forehead, was slaving for his parents' sakes—Robert used often to lie by Gilbert's side all night long without ever closing an eye in sleep; for that large heart of his, that loved all his eyes looked upon of nature's works living or dead, perfect as was its mechanism for the play of all lofty passions, would get suddenly disarranged, as if approached the very hour of death. Who will say that many more years were likely to have fallen to the lot of one so framed, had he all life long drunk, as in youth, but of the well-water—"laid down with the dove, and risen with the lark!" If excesses in which there was vice and therefore blame, did injure his health, how far more those other excesses in which there was so much virtue, and on which there should be praise for ever! Over-anxious, over-working hours beneath the mid-day sun, and sometimes to save a scanty crop beneath

the midnight moon, to which he looked up without knowing it with a poet's eyes, as he kept forking the sneaves on the high laden cart that "Hesperus, who led the starry host" beheld crashing into the barn-yard among shouts of "Harvest Home."

It has been thought that there are not a few prominent points of character common to Burns and Byron; and though no formal comparison between them has been drawn that we know of, nor would it be worth while attempting it, as not much would come of it, we suspect, without violent stretching and bending of materials, and that free play of fancy which makes no bones of facts, still there is this resemblance, that they both give unreserved expositions of their most secret feelings, undeterred by any fear of offending others, or of bringing censure on themselves by such revelations of the inner-man. Byron as a moral being was below Burns; and there is too often much affectation and insincerity in his Confessions. "Fare thee well, and if for ever, still for ever fare thee well," is not elegiac, but satirical; a complaint in which the bitterness is not of grief, but of gall; how unlike "The Lament on the unfortunate issue of a Friend's Amour" overflowing with the expression of every passion cognate with love's despair! Do not be startled by our asking you to think for a little while of Robert Burns along with—SAMUEL JOHNSON. Listen to him, and you hear as wise and good a man as earth ever saw for ever reproaching himself with his wickedness; "from almost the earliest time he could remember he had been forming schemes for a better life." Select from his notes, prayers, and diaries, and from the authentic records of his oral discourse, all acknowledgments of his evil thoughts, practices, and habits; all charges brought against him by conscience, of sins of omission and commission; all declarations, exclamations, and interjections of agonizing remorse and gloomy despair—from *them* write his character in his epitaph—and look *there* on the Christian Sage! God forbid! that saving truths should be so changed into destroying falsehoods. Slothful, selfish, sensual, envious, uncharitable, undutiful to his parents, thoughtless of Him who died to save sinners, and living without God in the world;—*That* is the wretched being named Samuel Johnson—in the eyes of his idolatrous

countrymen only a little lower than the angels—in his own a worm! Slothful! yet how various his knowledge! acquired by fits and snatches—book in hand, and poring as if nearly sand-blind—yet with eyes in their own range of vision, keen as the lynx's or the eagle's—on pages no better than blanks to common minds, to his hieroglyphical of wisest secrets—or in long assiduity of continuous studies, of which a month to him availed more than to you or us a year—or all we have had of life. Selfish! with obscure people, about whom nobody cared, provided for out of his slender means within doors, paupers though they thought it not, and though meanly endowed by nature as by fortune, admitted into the friendship of a Sage simple as a child—out of doors, pensioners waiting for him at the corners of streets, of whom he knew little, but that they were hungry and wanted bread, and probably had been brought by sin to sorrow. Sensual! Because his big body, getting old, “needed repairs,” and because though “Rasselas Prince of Abyssinia” had been written on an empty stomach, which happened when he was comparatively young and could not help it, now that he had reached his grand climacteric, he was determined to show not to the whole world, but to large parties, that all the fat of the earth was not meant for the mouths of block-heads. Envious! of David Garrick? Poh! poh! Pshaw! pshaw! Uncharitable? We have disposed of that clause of the verse in our commentary on “selfish.” Undutiful to his parents! He did all man could to support his mother; and having once disoblged his father by sulkily refusing to assist at his book-stall, half a century afterwards, more or less, when at the head of English literature, and the friend of Burke and Beauclerk, he stood bareheaded for an hour in the rain on the site of said book-stall, in the market place of Litchfield, in penance for that great sin. As to the last two charges in the indictment—if he was not a Christian, who can hope for salvation in the Cross? If his life was that of an atheist, who of woman born ever walked with God? Yet it is true he was a great sinner. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins,

he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Burns died in his thirty-eighth year. At that age what had Johnson done to be for ever remembered? He had written *Irene*, *London*, and the *Life of Savage*. Of *Irene* the world makes little account—it contains many just and noble sentiments—but it is a Tragedy without tears. The *Life* is an eloquent lie, told in the delusion of a friendship sealed by participated sorrows. *LONDON* is a satire of the true moral vein—more sincerely indignant with the vices it withers than its prototype in Juvenal—with all the vigor, without any of the coarseness of Dryden—with "the pointed propriety of Pope," and versification almost as musical as his, while not so monotonous—an immortal strain. But had he died in 1747, how slight had been our knowledge—our interest how dull—in the "*Life and Writings of Samuel Johnson!*" How slight our knowledge! We should never have known that in childhood he showed symptoms "of that jealous independence of spirit and impetuosity of temper which never forsook him"—as Burns in the same season had showed that "stubborn sturdy something in his disposition" which was there to the last;—That he displayed then "that power of memory for which he was all his life eminent to a degree almost incredible"—as Burns possessed that faculty—so thought Murdoch—in more strength than imagination;—That he never joined the other boys in their ordinary diversions "but would wander away into the fields talking to himself"—like Burns walking miles "to pay his respects to the Leglen wood;"—That when a boy he was immoderately fond of reading romances of chivalry—as Burns was of *Blind Harry*;—That he fell into "an inattention to religion or an indifference about it in his ninth year," and after his fourteenth "became a sort of lax *talker* against religion, for he did not much *think* about it, and this lasted till he went to Oxford, where it would not be *suffered*"—just as the child Burns was remarkable for an "enthusiastic idiot piety," and had pleasure during some years of his youth in puzzling his companions on points in divinity, till he saw his folly, and without getting his mouth shut, was mute;—That on his return home from Stourbridge school in his eighteenth year "he had no set-

tled plan of life, nor looked forward at all, but merely lived from day to day"—like Burns who, when a year or two older in his perplexity, writes to his father that he knows not what to do, and is sick of life;—That his love of literature was excited by accidentally finding a folio of Petrarch—as Burns's love of poetry was by an octavo Shenstone;—That he thereon became a glut-tonous book-devourer—as Burns did—"no book being so voluminous as to slacken his industry, or so antiquated as to damp his researches;"—That in his twentieth year he felt himself "overwhelmed with a horrible hypochondria, with perpetual irritation, fretfulness, and impatience, and with a dejection, gloom, and despair which rendered existence misery"—as Burns tells us he was afflicted—even earlier—and to the last—"with a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly to solitude"—with horrid flutterings and stoppages of the heart that often almost choked him, so that he had to fall out of bed into a tub of water to allay the anguish;—That he was at Pembroke College "caressed and loved by all about him as a gay and frolicsome fellow"—while "ah! Sir, I was mad and violent—it was bitterness which they mistook for frolic"—just as Burns was thought to be "with his strong appetite for sociality as well from native hilarity as from a pride of observation and remark," though when left alone desponding and distracted;—That he was generally seen lounging at the College gate, with a circle of students round him, whom he was entertaining with wit, and keeping from their studies, if not spiring them up to rebellion against the College discipline, which in his maturer years he so much extolled"—as Burns was sometimes seen at the door of a Public ridiculing the candles of the Auld Light and even spiring the callants against the Kirk itself, which we trust he looked on more kindly in future years;—That he had to quit college on his father's bankruptcy soon followed by death, as Burns in similar circumstances had to quit Lochlea;—"That in the forlorn state of his circumstances, *Ætat.* 23, he accepted of an offer to be employed as usher in the school of Market-Bosworth," where he was miserable—just as Burns was at the same age, not indeed flogging boys but flailing barns, "a poor insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, and stalking up and down fairs and mar-

kets:—That soon after “he published proposals for printing by subscription the Latin Poems of Politian at two shillings and sixpence, but that there were not subscribers enough to secure a sufficient sale, so the work never appeared, and probably never was executed”—as Burns soon after issued proposals for printing by subscription on terms rather higher “among others the Ordination, Scotch Drink, the Cottar’s Saturday Night, and an Address to the Deil,” which volume ere long was published accordingly and had a great sale;—That he had, “from early youth, been sensible to the influence of female charms, and when at Stourbridge school was much enamored of Olivia Lloyd, a young Quaker, to whom he wrote a copy of verses”—just as Burns was—and did—in the case of Margaret Thomson, in the kale-yard at Kirkoswald, and of many others;—That his “juvenile attachments to the fair sex were however very transient, and it is certain that he formed no criminal connection whatever; Mr. Hector, who lived with him in the utmost intimacy and social freedom, having assured me that even at that ardent season his conduct was strictly virtuous in that respect”—just so with Burns who fell in love with every lass he saw “come wading barefoot all alane,” while his brother Gilbert gives us the same assurance of his continence in all his youthful loves;—That “in a man whom religious education has saved from licentious indulgences, the passion of love when once it has seized him is exceeding strong, and this was experienced by Johnson when he became the fervent admirer of Mrs. Porter after her first husband’s death”—as it was unfortunately too much the case with Burns, though he did not marry a widow double his own age—but one who was a Maid till she met Rob Mossgiel—and some six years younger than himself;—That unable to find subsistence in his native place, or anywhere else, he was driven by want to try his fortune in London, “the great field of genius and exertion, where talents of every kind have the fullest scope, and the highest encouragement,” on his way thither, “riding and tying” with Davie Garrick—just as Burns was impelled to make an experiment on Edinburgh, journeying thither on foot, but without any companion in his adventure;—that after getting on there indifferently well, he returned “in the course of the

next summer to Lichfield, where he had left Mrs. Johnson," and stayed there three weeks, his mother asking him whether, when in London, "He was one of those who gave the wall or those who took it"—just as Burns returned to Mauchline, where he had left Mrs. Burns, and remained in the neighborhood about the same period of time, his mother having said to him on his return, "O, Robert ;"—That he took his wife back with him to London, resolving to support her the best way he could, by the cultivation of the fields of literature, and chiefly through an engagement as gauger and supervisor to Cave's Magazine—as Burns, with similar purposes, and not dissimilar means, brought his wife to Ellisland, then to Dumfries ;—That partly from necessity and partly from inclination, he used to perambulate the streets of the city at all hours of the night, and was far from being prim or precise in his company, associating much with one Savage at least who had rubbed shoulders with the gallows—just as Burns on Jenny Geddes and her successor kept skirring the country at all hours, though we do not hear of any of his companions having been stabbers in brothel-brawls ;—That on the publication of his "London," that city rang with applause, and Pope pronounced the author—yet anonymous—a true poet, who would soon be *déterré*, while General Oglethorpe became his patron, and such a prodigious sensation did his genius make, that in the fulness of his fame, Earl Gower did what he could to set him on the way of being elevated to a schoolmastership in some small village in Shropshire or Staffordshire, "of which the certain salary was *sixty pounds a-year, which would make him happy for life*"—so said English Earl Gower to an Irish Dean called Jonathan Swift—just as Burns soon after the publication of "Tam o' Shanter," was in great favor with Captain Grose—though there was then no need for any poet to tell the world he was one, as he had been "*déterré* a year or two before, and by the unexampled exertions of Grahame of Fintry, the Earl of Glencairn being oblivious or dead, was translated to the diocese of Dumfries, where he died in the thirty-eighth year of his age ; the very year, we believe, of *his*, in which Johnson issued the prospectus of his Dictionary ;—and here we leave the Lexicographer for a

moment to himself, and let our mind again be occupied for a moment exclusively by the Exciseman.

You will not suppose that we seriously insist on this parallel as if the lines throughout ran straight ; or that we are not well aware that there was far from being in reality such complete correspondence of the circumstances—much less the characters of the men. But both had to struggle for their very lives—it was sink or swim—and by their own buoyancy they were borne up. In Johnson's case, there is not one dark stain on the story of all those melancholy and memorable years. Hawkins indeed more than insinuates that there was a separation between him and his wife, at the time he associated with Savage, and used with that profligate to stroll the streets ; and that she was "harbored by a friend near the Tower ;" but Croker justly remarks—"That there never has existed any human being, all the details of whose life, all the motives of whose actions, all the thoughts of whose mind, have been so unreservedly brought before the public ; even his prayers, his most secret meditations, and his most scrupulous self-reproaches, have been laid before the world ; and there is not to be found, in all the unparalleled information thus laid before us, a single trace to justify the accusation which Hawkins so wantonly and so odiously, and it may be assumed, so falsely makes." However, he walked in the midst of evil—he was familiar with the faces of the wicked—the guilty, as they were passing by, he did not always shun, as if they were lepers ; he had a word for them—poor as he was, a small coin—for they were of the unfortunate and forlorn, and his heart was pitiful. So was that of Burns. Very many years Heaven allotted to the Sage, that virtue might be instructed by wisdom—all the good acknowledge that he is great—and his memory is hallowed for evermore in the gratitude of Christendom. In his prime it pleased God to cut off the Poet—but his genius too has left a blessing to his own people—and has diffused noble thoughts, generous sentiments, and tender feelings over many lands, and most of all among them who more especially feel that they are his brethren, the Poor who make the Rich, and like him are happy, in spite of its hardships, in their own condition. Let the imperfections of his character then be spared, if it be even

for the sake of his genius ; on higher grounds let it be honored ; for if there was much weakness, its strength was mighty, and his *religious* country is privileged to forget his frailties, in humble trust that they are forgiven.

We have said but little hitherto of Burns's religion. Some have denied that he had any religion at all—a rash and cruel denial—made in the face of his genius, his character, and his life. What man in his senses ever lived without religion ? “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”—was Burns an atheist ? We do not fear to say that he was religious far beyond the common run of men, even them who may have had a more consistent and better considered creed. The lessons he received in the “auld clay biggin” were not forgotten through life. He speaks—and we believe him—of his “early ingrained piety” having been long remembered to good purpose—what he called his “idiot piety”—not meaning thereby to disparage it, but merely that it was in childhood an instinct. “Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name !” is breathed from the lips of infancy with the same feeling at its heart that beats towards its father on earth, as it kneels in prayer by his side. No one surely will doubt his sincerity when he writes from Irvine to his father—“Honor'd sir—I am quite transported at the thought, that e'er long, perhaps soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasinesses, and disquietudes of this weary life ; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it, and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it. It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me, for all that this world has to offer. ‘15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple ; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. 16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.’” When he gives lessons to a young man for

his conduct in life, one of them is, "The great Creator to adore;" when he consoles a friend on the death of a relative, "he points the brimful grief-worn eyes to scenes beyond the grave;" when he expresses benevolence to a distressed family, he beseeches the aid of Him "who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb;" when he feels the need of aid to control his passions, he implores that of the "Great Governor of all below;" when in sickness, he has a prayer for the pardon of all his errors, and an expression of confidence in the goodness of God; when suffering from the ills of life, he asks for the grace of resignation, "because they are thy will;" when he observes the sufferings of the virtuous, he remembers a rectifying futurity;—he is religious not only when surprised by occasions such as these, but also on set occasions; he had regular worship in his family while at Ellisland—we know not how it was at Dumfries, but we do know that there he catechised his children every Sabbath evening;—Nay, he does not enter a Druidical circle without a prayer to God.

He viewed the Creator chiefly in his attributes of love, goodness, and mercy. "In proportion as we are wrung with grief, or distracted with anxiety, the ideas of a superintending Deity, an Almighty protector, are doubly dear." Him he never lost sight of, or confidence in, even in the depths of his remorse. An avenging God was too seldom in his contemplations—from the little severity in his own character—from a philosophical view of the inscrutable causes of human frailty—and most of all, from a diseased aversion to what was so much the theme of the sour Calvinism around him; but which would have risen up an appalling truth in such a soul as his, had it been habituated to profounder thought on the mysterious corruption of our fallen nature.

Sceptical thoughts as to revealed religion had assailed his mind, while with expanding powers it "communed with the glorious universe;" and in 1787 he writes from Edinburgh to a "Mr. James M'Candlish, student in physis, College, Glasgow," who had favored him with a long argumentative infidel letter, "I, likewise, since you and I were first acquainted, in the pride of despising old women's stories, ventured on 'the daring path

Spinoza trod ;' but experience of the weakness, not the strength of human powers, *made me glad to grasp at revealed religion.*" When at Ellisland, he writes to Mrs. Dunlop, " My idle reasonings sometimes make me a little sceptical, but the necessities of my heart always give the cold philosophizings the lie. Who looks for the heart weaned from earth ; the soul affianced to her God ; the correspondence fixed with heaven ; the pious supplication and devout thanksgiving, constant as the vicissitudes of even and morn ; who thinks to meet with these in the court, the palace, in the glare of public life ! No : to find them in their precious importance and divine efficacy, we must search among the obscure recesses of disappointment, affliction, poverty, and distress." And again, next year, from the same place to the same correspondent, " That there is an incomprehensibly Great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that he must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature he has made—these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between vice and virtue, and consequently, that I am an accountable creature ; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive sense of existence beyond the grave, must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther and affirm, that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though *to appearance* he was himself the obscurest and most illiterate of our species : therefore Jesus was from God." Indeed, all his best letters to Mrs. Dunlop are full of the expression of religious feeling and religious faith ; though it must be confessed with pain, that he speaks with more confidence in the truth of natural than of revealed religion, and too often lets sentiments inadvertently escape him, that, taken by themselves, would imply that his religious belief was but a Christianized Theism. Of the immortality of the soul, he never expresses any serious doubt; though now and then, his expressions, though

beautiful, want their usual force, as if he felt the inadequacy of the human mind to the magnitude of the theme. "Ye venerable sages, and holy flamens, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death; or are they all alike baseless visions and fabricated fables? If there is another life, it must be only for the just, the amiable, and the humane. What a flattering idea this of the world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it as I ardently wish it."

How, then, could honored Thomas Carlyle bring himself to affirm, "that Burns had no religion?" His religion was in much imperfect—but its incompleteness you discern only on a survey of all his effusions, and by inference; for his particular expressions of a religious kind are genuine, and as acknowledgments of the superabundant goodness and greatness of God, they are in unison with the sentiments of the devoutest Christian. But remorse never suggests to him the inevitable corruption of man; Christian humility he too seldom dwells on, though without it there cannot be Christian faith; and he is silent on the need of reconciliation between the divine attributes of Justice and Mercy. The absence of all this might pass unnoticed, were not the religious sentiment so prevalent in his confidential communications with his friends in his most serious and solemn moods. In them there is frequent, habitual recognition of the Creator; and who that finds joy and beauty in nature has not the same? It may be well supposed that if common men are more ideal in religion than in other things, so would be Burns. He who has lent the colors of his fancy to common things, would not withhold them from divine. Something—he knew not what—he would exact of man—more impressively reverential than anything he is wont to offer to God, or perhaps can offer in the way of institution—in temples made with hands. The *heartfelt* adoration always has a grace for him—in the silent bosom—in the lonely cottage—in any place where circumstances are a pledge of its reality; but the moment it ceases to be *heartfelt*, and visibly so, it loses his respect, it seems as profanation. "Mine is the religion of the breast;" and if it be not, what is it worth? But it must also revive a right spirit within us; and there may be gratitude for goodness, without such change as is

required of us in the gospel. He was too buoyant with immortal spirit within him not to credit its immortal destination ; he was too thoughtful in his human love not to feel how different must be our affections if they are towards flowers which the blast of death may wither, or towards spirits which are but beginning to live in our sight, and are gathering good and evil here for an eternal life. Burns believed that by his own unassisted understanding, and his own unassisted heart, he saw and felt those great truths, forgetful of this great truth, that he had been taught them in the Written Word. Had all he learned in the "auld clay biggin" become a blank—all the knowledge inspired into his heart during the evenings, when "the sire turned o'er wi' patriarchal air, the big ha'-bible, ance his father's pride," how little or how much would he then have known of God and Immortality ? In that delusion he shared more or less with one and all—whether poets or philosophers—who have put their trust in natural Theology. As to the glooms in which his sceptical reason had been involved, they do not seem to have been so thick—so dense—as in the case of men without number, who have, by the blessing of God, become true Christians. Of his levities on certain celebrations of religious rites, we before ventured an explanation ; and while it is to be lamented that he did not more frequently dedicate the genius that shed so holy a lustre over "The Cottar's Saturday Night," to the service of religion, let it be remembered how few poets have done so—alas ! too few—that he, like his tuneful brethren, must often have been deterred by a sense of his own unworthiness from approaching its awful mysteries—and above all, that he was called to his account before he had attained his thoughtful prime.

And now that we are approaching the close of our Memoir, it may be well for a little while clearly to consider Burns's position in this world of ours, where we humans often find ourselves, we cannot tell how, in strange positions ; and where there are, on all hands, so many unintelligible things going on, that in all languages an active existence is assumed of such powers as Chance, Fortune, and Fate. Was he more unhappy than the generality of gifted men ? In what did that unhappiness consist ? How far was it owing to himself or others ?

We have seen, that up to early manhood his life was virtuous, and therefore must have been happy—that by magnanimously enduring a hard lot, he made it veritably a light one—and that though subject “to a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made him fly to solitude,” he enjoyed the society of his own humble sphere with proportionate enthusiasm, and even then derived deep delight from his genius. That genius quickly waxed strong, and very suddenly he was in full power as a poet. No sooner was passion indulged than it prevailed—and he who had so often felt during his abstinent sore-toiled youth that “a blink of rest’s a sweet enjoyment,” had now often to rue the self-brought trouble that banishes rest even from the bed of labor, whose sleep would otherwise be without a dream. “I have for some time been pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society, or the vagaries of the Muse.” These agonies had a well-known particular cause, but his errors were frequent and to his own eyes flagrant—yet he was no irreligious person—and exclaimed—“Oh! thou great, unknown Power! thou Almighty God! who hast lighted up reason in my breast, and blessed me with immortality! I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of thy works, yet thou hast never left me nor forsaken me.” What signified it to him that he was then very poor? The worst evils of poverty are moral evils, and them he then knew not; nay, in that school he was trained to many virtues, which might not have been so conspicuous even in his noble nature, but for that severest nurture. Shall we ask, what signified it to him that he was very poor to the last? Alas! it signified much; for when a poor man becomes a husband and a father, a new heart is created within him, and he often finds himself trembling in fits of unendurable, because unavailing fears. Of such anxieties Burns suffered much; yet better men than Burns—better because sober and more religious—have suffered far more; nor in their humility and resignation did they say even unto themselves “that God had given their share.”

His worst sufferings had their source in a region impenetrable to the visitations of mere worldly calamities; and might have been even more direful, had his life basked in the beams of fortune, in place of being chilled in its shade. "My mind my kingdom is"—few men have had better title to make that boast than Burns; but sometimes raged there *plus quam civilia bella*—and on the rebellious passions, no longer subjects, at times it seemed as if he cared not to impose peace.

Why, then, such clamor about his condition—such outcry about his circumstances—such horror of his Excisemanship? Why should Scotland, on whose "brow shame is ashamed to sit," hang down her head when bethinking her of how she treated him? Hers the glory of having *produced him*; where lies the blame of his penury, his soul's trouble, his living body's emaciation, its untimely death?

His country cried, "All hail, mine own inspired Bard!" and his heart was in heaven. But heaven on earth is a mid-region not unvisited by storms. Divine indeed must be the descending light, but the ascending gloom may be dismal; in imagination's airy realms the Poet cannot forget he is a Man—his passions pursue him thither—and "that mystical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to them than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors." The primeval curse is felt through all the regions of being; and he who in the desire of fame having merged all other desires, finds himself on a sudden in its blaze, is disappointed of his spirit's corresponding transport, without which it is but a glare; and remembering the sweet calm of his obscurity, when it was enlivened not disturbed by soaring aspirations, would fain fly back to its secluded shades and be again his own lowly natural self in the privacy of his own humble birth-place. Something of this kind happened to Burns. He was soon sick of the dust and din that attended him on his illumined path; and felt that he had been happier at Moss-giel than he ever was in the Metropolis—when but to relieve his heart of its pathos, he sung in the solitary field to the mountain daisy, than when to win applause, on the crowded street he chanted in ambitious strains—

“Edina ! Scotia’s darling seat !

All hail thy palaces and towers,
Where once beneath a monarch’s feet
Sat legislation’s sov’reign powers !
From marking wildly-scatter’d flow’rs,
As on the banks of Ayr I stray’d,
And singing, lone, the lingering hours,
I shelter in thy honor’d shade.”

He returned to his natural condition, when he settled at Ellisland. Nor can we see what some have seen, any strong desire in him after preferment to a higher sphere. Such thoughts sometimes must have entered his mind, but they found no permanent dwelling there ; and he fell back, not only without pain, but with more than pleasure, on all the remembrances of his humble life. He resolved to pursue it in the same scenes, and the same occupations, and to continue to be what he had always been—a Farmer.

And why should the Caledonian Hunt have wished to divert or prevent him ? Why should Scotland ? What patronage, pray tell us, ought the Million and Two Thirds to have bestowed on their poet ? With five hundred pounds in the pockets of his buckskin breeches, perhaps he was about as rich as yourself—and then he had a mine—which we hope you have too—in his brain. Something no doubt *might* have been done for him, and if you insist that something *should*, we are not in the humor of argumentation, and shall merely observe that the opportunities to serve him were somewhat narrowed by the want of special preparation for any profession ; but supposing that nobody thought of promoting him, it was simply because everybody was thinking of getting promoted himself ; and though selfishness is very odious, not more so surely in Scotsmen than in other people, except indeed that more is expected from them on account of their superior intelligence and virtue.

Burns’s great calling here below was to illustrate the peasant life of Scotland. Ages may pass without another arising fit for that task ; meanwhile the whole pageant of Scottish life has passed away without a record. Let him remain, therefore, in the place which best fits him for the task, though it may not be

the best for his personal comfort. If an individual can serve his country at the expense of his comfort, he *must*, and others should not hinder him ; if self-sacrifice is required of him, they must not be blamed for permitting it. Burns followed his calling to the last, with more lets and hindrances than the friends of humanity could have wished ; but with a power that might have been weakened by his removal from what he loved and gloried in—by the disruption of his heart from its habits, and the breaking up of that custom which with many men becomes second nature, but which with him was corroboration and sanctification of the first, both being but one agency—its products how beautiful ! Like the flower and fruit of a tree that grows well only in its own soil, and by its own river.

But a *Gauger* ! What do we say to that ? Was it not most unworthy ? We ask, unworthy what ? You answer, his genius. But who expects the employments by which men live to be entirely worthy of their genius—congenial with their dispositions—suited to the structure of their souls ? It sometimes happens, but far oftener not—rarely in the case of poets, and most rarely of all in the case of such a poet as Burns. It is a law of nature that the things of the world come by honest industry, and that genius is its own reward, in the pleasure of its exertions and its applause. But who made Burns a gauger ? Himself. It was his own choice. “I have been feeling all the various rotations and movements within respecting the excise,” he writes to Aiken soon after the Kilmarnock edition. “There are many things plead strongly against it,” he adds, but these were all connected with his unfortunate private affairs ; to the calling itself he had no repugnance ; what he most feared was “the uncertainty of getting soon into business.” To Graham of Fintry he writes, a year after the Edinburgh edition, “Ye know, I dare say, of an application I lately made to your Board to be admitted an officer of excise. I have, according to form, been examined by a supervisor, and to-day I gave in two certificates, with a request for an order for instructions. In this affair, if I succeed, I am afraid I shall but too much need a patronizing friend. Propriety of conduct as a man, and fidelity and attention as an officer, I dare engage for ; *but with anything*

like business, except manual labor, I am totally unacquainted.

* * I know, Sir, that to need your goodness is to have a claim on it; may I therefore beg your patronage to forward me in this affair, till I be appointed to a division, where, by the help of rigid economy, I will try to support that independence so dear to my soul, but which has been too often distant from my situation." To Miss Chalmers he writes, "You will condemn me for the next step I have taken. I have entered into the excise. I have chosen this, my dear friend, after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of fortune's palace we shall enter in, but what door does she open for us? I got this without any hanging on, or mortifying solicitation: it is immediate support, and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, it is plenty in comparison of all my preceding life; besides, the Commissioners are some of them my acquaintance, and all of them my firm friends." To Dr. Moore he writes, "There is still one thing would make me quite easy. I have an excise officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a treasury warrant for supervisor, surveyor-general, &c." It is needless to multiply quotations to the same effect. Burns with his usual good sense took into account, in his own estimate of such a calling, not his genius, which had really nothing to do with it, but all his early circumstances, and his present prospects; nor does it seem at any time to have been a source of much discomfort to himself; on the contrary, he looks forward to an increase of its emoluments with hope and satisfaction. We are not now speaking of the disappointment of his hopes of rising in the profession, but of the profession itself: "A supervisor's income varies," he says, in a letter to Heron of that ilk, "from about a hundred and twenty to two hundred a year; but the business is an incessant drudgery, and would be nearly a complete bar to every species of literary pursuit. The moment I am appointed supervisor, I may be nominated on the collector's list; and this is always a business purely of political patronage. A collectorship varies much, from better than two hundred a year to near a thousand. They also come forward by precedency on the list;

and have, besides a handsome income, a life of complete leisure. A life of literary leisure, with a decent competency, is the summit of my wishes." With such views, Burns became a gauger as well as a farmer; we can see no degradation in his having done so—no reason why whimpering cockneys should continually cry "Shame! shame! on Scotland" for having let "Bunns"—as they pronounce him—adopt his own mode of life. Allan Cuninghame informs us that the officers of excise on the Nith were then a very superior set of men indeed to those who now ply on the Thames. Burns saw nothing to despise in honest men who did their duty; he could pick and choose among them; and you do not imagine that he was obliged to associate exclusively or intimately with ushers of the rod. Gaugers are gregarious, but not so gregarious as barristers and bagmen. The Club is composed of gauger, shop-keeper, schoolmaster, surgeon, retired merchant, minister, assistant-and-successor, cidevant militia captain, one of the heroes of the Peninsula with a wooden-leg, and haply a horse-marine. These are the ordinary members; but among the honorary you find men of high degree, squires of some thousands, and baronets of some hundreds a-year. The rise in that department has been sometimes so sudden as to astonish the unexcised. A gauger, of a very few years' standing, has been known, after a quarter's supervisorship, to ascend the collector's—and ere this planet had performed another revolution round the sun—the Comptroller's chair—from which he might well look down on the Chancellor of England.

Let it not be thought that we are running counter to the common feeling in what we have now been saying, nor blame us for speaking in a tone of levity on a serious subject. We cannot bear to hear people at one hour scorning the distinctions of rank, and acknowledging none but of worth; and at another whining for the sake of worth without rank, and estimating a man's happiness—which is something more than his respectability—by the amount of his income, or according to the calling from which it is derived. Such persons cannot have read Burns. Or do they think that such sentiments as "The rank is but the guinea stamp, the man's the gowd for a' that," are all very fine in verse,

but have no place in the prose of life, no application among men of sense to its concerns? But in how many departments have not men to addict themselves almost all their lives to the performance of duties, which, merely as acts or occupations, are in themselves as unintellectual as polishing a pin? Why, a pin-polisher may be a poet, who rounds its head an orator, who sharpens its point a metaphysician. Wait his time, and you hear the first singing like a nightingale in the autumnal season; the second roaring like a bull, and no mistake; the third, in wandering mazes lost, like a prisoner trying to thread the Cretan labyrinth without his clue. Let a man but have something that he must do or starve, nor be nice about its nature; and be ye under no alarm about the degradation of his soul. Let him even be a tailor; nay, that is carrying the principle too far; but any other handicraft let him for short hours—ten out of the eighteen (six he may sleep) for three score years and ten—assiduously cultivate, or if fate have placed him in a ropery, doggedly pursue; and if nature have given him genius, he will find time to instruct or enchant the world; if but goodness, time to benefit it by his example, “though never heard of half a mile from home.”

Who in this country, if you except an occasional statesman, take their places at once in the highest grade of their calling? In the learned professions, what obscurest toil must not the brightest go through! Under what a pressure of mean observances the proudest stoop their heads! The color-ensign in a black regiment has risen to be colonel in the Rifle-brigade. The middy in a gun-brig on the African station has commanded a three-decker at Trafalgar. Through successive grades they must all go—the armed and the gowned alike; the great law of advancement holds among men of noble and of ignoble birth, not without exceptions indeed in favor of family, and of fortune too, more or less frequent, more or less flagrant—but talent, and integrity, and honor, and learning, and genius, are not often heard complaining of foul play; if you deny it, their triumph is the more glorious, for generally they win the day, and when they have won it—that is, risen in their profession, what becomes of them then? Soldiers or civilians, they must go where

they are ordered, in obedience to the same great law ; they appeal to their services when insisting on being sent—and in some pestilential climate swift death benumbs

“ Hands that the rod of empire might have sway’d—
Or wak’d to ecstasy the living lyre.”

It is drudgery to sit six, or eight, or ten hours a-day as a clerk in the India-house ; but Charles Lamb endured it for forty years, not without much headache and heartache too, we dare say ; but Elia shows us how the unwearied flame of genius can please itself by playing in the thickest gloom ; how fancy can people dreariest vacancy with rarest creatures holding communion in quaintest converse with the finest feelings of the thoughtful heart—how eyes dim with poring all day on a ledger, can glisten through the evening, and far on into the night, with those alternate visitings of humor and of pathos that for a while come and go as if from regions in the spirit separate and apart, but ere long by their quiet blending persuade us to believe that their sources are close adjacent, and that the streams, when left to themselves, often love to unite their courses, and to flow on together with merry or melancholy music, just as we choose to think it, as smiles may be the order of the hour, or as we may be commanded by the touch of some unknown power within us to indulge the luxury of tears.

Why, then, we ask again, such lamentation for the fate of Burns ? Why should not he have been left to make his own way in life like other men gifted or ungifted ? A man of great genius in the prime of life is poor. But his poverty did not for any long time necessarily affect the welfare or even comfort of the poet, and therefore created no obligation on his country to interfere with his lot. He was born and bred in an humble station—but such as it was, it did not impede his culture, fame, or service to his people, or rightly considered, his own happiness ; let him remain in it, or leave it as he will and can, but there was no obligation on others to take him out of it. He had already risen superior to circumstances—and would do so still ; his glory availed much in having conquered them ; give him

better, and the peculiar species of his glory will depart. Give him better, and it may be, that he achieves no more glory of any kind. For nothing is more uncertain than the effects of circumstances on character. Some men, we know, are specially adapted to adverse circumstances, rising thereby as the kite rises to the adverse breeze, and falling when the adversity ceases. Such was probably Burns's nature—his genius being piqued to activity by the contradictions of his fortune.

Suppose that some generous rich man had accidentally become acquainted with the lad Robert Burns, and grieving to think that such a mind should continue boorish among boors, had, much to his credit, taken him from the plough, sent him to College, and given him a complete education. Doubtless he would have excelled; for he was "quick to learn, and wise to know." But he would not have been SCOTLAND'S BURNS. The prodigy had not been exhibited of a poet of the first order in that rank of life. It is an instructive spectacle for the world, and let the instruction take effect by the continuance of the spectacle for its natural period. Let the poet work at that calling which is clearly meant for him—he is "native and endued to the element" of his situation—there is no appearance of his being alien or strange to it—he professes proudly that his ambition is to illustrate the very life he exists in—his happiest moments are in doing so—and he is reconciled to it by its being thus blended with the happiest exertions of his genius. We must look at his lot as a whole—from beginning to end—and so looked at it was not unsuitable—but the reverse; for as to its later afflictions they were not such as of necessity belonged to it, were partly owing to himself, partly to others, partly to evil influences peculiar not to his calling, but to the times.

If Burns had not been prematurely cut off, it is not to be doubted that he would have got promotion either by favor, or in the ordinary course; and had that happened, he would not have had much cause for complaint, nor would he have complained that like other men he had to wait events, and reach competence or affluence by the usual routine. He would, like other men, have then looked back on his narrow circumstances, and their privations, as conditions which, from the first, he knew

must precede preferment, and would no more have thought such hardships peculiar to his lot, than the first lieutenant of a frigate, the rough work he had had to perform, on small pay, and no delicate mess between decks, when he was a mate, though then perhaps a better seaman than the Commodore.

With these sentiments we do not expect that all who honor this *Mémoire* with a perusal will entirely sympathize; but imperfect as it is, we have no fear of its favorable reception by our friends, on the score of its pervading spirit. As to the poor creatures who purse up their unmeaning mouths, trying too without the necessary feature to sport the supercilious—and instead of speaking daggers, pip pins against the “Scotch”—they are just the very vermin who used to bite Burns, and one would pause for a moment in the middle of a sentence to impale a dozen of them on one’s pen, if they happened to crawl across one’s paper. But our Southern brethren—the noble English—who may not share these sentiments of ours—will think “more in sorrow than in anger” of Burns’s fate, and for his sake will be loth to blame his mother land. They must think with a sigh of their own Bloomfield, and Clare! Our Burns indeed was a greater far; but they will call to mind the calamities of their men of genius, of discoverers in science, who advanced the wealth of nations, and died of hunger—of musicians who taught the souls of the people in angelic harmonies to commerce with heaven, and dropt unhonored into a hole of earth—of painters who glorified the very sunrise and sunset, and were buried in places for a long time obscure as the shadow of oblivion—and surpassing glory and shame of all—

“OF MIGHTY POETS IN THEIR MISERY DEAD.”

We never think of the closing years of Burns’s life, without feeling what not many seem to have felt, that much more of their unhappiness is to be attributed to the most mistaken notion he had unfortunately taken up, of there being something degrading in genius *in writing for money*, than perhaps to all other causes put together, certainly far more than to his professional calling, however unsuitable that may have been to a poet. By

persisting in a line of conduct pursuant to that persuasion, he kept himself in perpetual poverty ; and though it is not possible to blame him severely for such a fault, originating as it did in the generous enthusiasm of the poetical character, a most serious fault it was, and its consequences were most lamentable. So far from being an extravagant man, in the common concerns of life he observed a proper parsimony ; and they must have been careless readers indeed, both of his prose and verse, who have taxed him with lending the colors of his genius to set off with a false lustre that profligate profuseness, habitual only with the selfish, and irreconcilable with any steadfast domestic virtue.

“ To catch dame Fortune’s golden smile,
Assiduous wait upon her ;
And gather gear by every wile
That’s justified by honor ;
Not for to hide it in a hedge,
Nor for a train attendant ;
BUT FOR THE GLORIOUS PRIVILEGE
OF BEING INDEPENDENT.”

Such was the advice he gave to a young friend in 1786, and in 1789, in a letter to Robert Ainslie, he says, “ Your poets, spend-thrifts, and other fools of that kidney pretend, forsooth, to crack their jokes on prudence—but ’tis a squalid vagabond glorying in his rags. Still, imprudence respecting money matters is much more pardonable than imprudence respecting character. I have no objections to prefer prodigality to avarice, in some few instances : but I appeal to your own observation if you have not often met with the same disingenuousness, the same hollow-hearted insincerity, and disintegrative depravity of principle, in the hackneyed victims of profusion, as in the unfeeling children of parsimony.” Similar sentiments will recur to every one familiar with his writings—all through them till the very end. His very songs are full of them—many of the best impressively preaching in sweetest numbers industry and thrift. So was he privileged to indulge in poetic transports—to picture, without reproach, the genial hours in the poor man’s life, alas ! but too unfrequent, and therefore to be enjoyed with a lawful revelry,

at once obedient to the iron-tongued knell that commands it to cease. So was he justified in scorning the close-fisted niggardliness that forces up one finger after another, as if *chirted* by a screw, and then shows to the pauper a palm with a *doit*. "Take care of the pennies, and the pounds will take care of themselves," is an excellent maxim ; but we do not look for illustrations of it in poetry ; perhaps it is too importunate in prose. Full-grown moralists and political economists, eager to promote the virtue and the wealth of nations, can study it scientifically in Adam Smith—but the boy must have two buttons to his fob and a clasp, who would seek for it in Robert Burns. The bias of poor human nature seems to lean sufficiently to self, and to require something to balance it the other way ; what more effectual than the touch of a poet's finger ? We cannot relieve every wretch we meet—yet if we "take care of the pennies," how shall the hunger that beseeches us on the street get a bap ? If we let "the pounds take care of themselves," how shall we answer to God at the great day of judgment—remembering how often we had let "unpityed want retire to die—" the white-faced widow pass us unrelieved, in faded weeds that seemed as if they were woven of dust ?

In his poetry, Burns taught love and pity ; in his life he practised them. Nay, though seldom free from the pressure of poverty, so ignorant was he of the science of duty, that to the very last he was a notorious giver of alms. Many an impostor must have preyed on his meal-girnel at Ellisland ; perhaps the old sick sailor was one, who nevertheless repaid several weeks' board and lodging with a cutter one-foot keel, and six pound burthen, which young Bobby Burns—such is this uncertain word—*grat* one Sabbath to see a total wreck far off in the mid-eddies of the mighty Nith. But the idiot who got his dole from the poet's own hand, as often as he chose to come churming up the Vennel, he was no impostor, and though he had lost his wits, retained a sense of gratitude, and returned a blessing in such phrase as they can articulate "whose lives are hidden with God."

How happened it, then, that such a man was so neglectful of his wife and family, as to let their hearts often ache while he

was in possession of a productive genius that might so easily have procured for them all the necessities, and conveniences, and some even of the luxuries of life? By the Edinburgh edition of his poems, and the copyright to Creech, he had made a little fortune, and we know how well he used it. From the day of his final settlement with that money-making, story-telling, magisterial bibliopole, who rejoiced for many years in the name of Provost—to the week before his death, his poetry, and that too sorely against his will, brought him in—*ten pounds!* Had he thereby annually earned fifty—what happy faces at that fire-side! how different that household! comparatively—how calm that troubled life!

All the poetry, by which he was suddenly made so famous, had been written, as you know, without the thought of *money* having so much as flitted across his mind. The delight of embodying in verse the visions of his inspired fancy—of awakening the sympathies of the few rustic auditors in his own narrow circle, whose hearts he well knew throbbed with the same emotions that are dearest to humanity all over the wide world—that had been at first all in all to him—the young poet exulting in his power and in the proof of his power—till as the assurance of his soul in its divine endowment waxed stronger and stronger he beheld his country's muse with the holly-wreath in her hand, and bowed his head to receive the everlasting halo. "And take thou *this* she smiling said"—that smile was as a seal set on his fame for ever—and "in the old clay biggin" he was happy to the full measure of his large heart's desire. His poems grew up like flowers before his tread—they came out like singing-birds from the thickets—they grew like clouds on the sky—there they were in their beauty, and he hardly knew they were his own—so quiet had been their creation, so like the process of nature among her material loveliness, in the season of spring when life is again evolved out of death, and the renovation seems as if it would never more need the Almighty hand, in that immortal union of earth and heaven.

You will not think these words extravagant, if you have well considered the *ecstasy* in which the spirit of the poet was lifted up above the carking cares of his toilsome life, by the conscious-

ness of the genius that had been given him to idealize it. "My heart rejoiced in Nature's joy" he says, remembering the beautiful happiness of a summer day reposing on the woods; and from that line we know how intimate had been his communion with Nature long before he had indited to her a single lay of love. And still as he wandered among her secret haunts he thought of her poets—with a fearful hope that he might one day be of the number—and most of all of Ferguson and Ramsay, because they belonged to Scotland, were Scottish in all their looks, and all their language, in the very habits of their bodies, and in the very frames of their souls—humble names now indeed compared with his own, but to the end sacred in his generous and grateful bosom; for at "The Farmer's Ingle" his imagination had kindled into the "Cottar's Saturday Night;" in the "Gentle Shepherd" he had seen many a happy sight that had furnished the matter, we had almost said inspired the emotion, of some of his sweetest and most gladsome songs. In his own every-day working world he walked as a man contented with the pleasure arising in his mere human heart; but that world the poet could purify and elevate at will into a celestial sphere, still lightened by Scottish skies, still melodious with Scottish streams, still inhabited by Scottish life—sweet as reality—dear as truth—yet visionary as fiction's dream, and felt to be in part the work of his own creation. Proudly, therefore, on that poorest soil the peasant poet bade speed the plough—proudly he stooped his shoulders to the sack of corn, itself a cart-load—proudly he swept the scythe that swathed the flowery herbage—proudly he grasped the sickle—but tenderly too he "turned the weeder clips aside, and *spared the symbol dear.*"

Well was he entitled to say to his friend Aiken, in the dedicatory stanza of the Cottar's Saturday Night :

"My loved, my honored, most respected friend !
No *mercenary* bard his homage pays ;
With honest pride I scorn each selfish end,
My dearest meed, a friend's esteem and praise "

All that he hoped to make by the Kilmarnock edition was twenty pounds to carr_y him to the West Indies, heedless of the yellow

fever. At Edinburgh fortune hand in hand with fame descended on the bard in a shower of gold ; but he had not courted “ the smiles of the fickle goddess,” and she soon wheeled away with scornful laughter out of his sight for ever and a day. His poetry had been composed in the fields, with not a plack in the pocket of the poet ; and we verily believe that he thought no more of the circulating medium than did the poor mouse in whose fate he saw his own—but more unfortunate !

“ Still thou art blest compared wi’ *me* !
 The *present* only toucheth thee :
 But och ! I backward cast my e’e
 On prospects drear !
 An’ forward, though I canna see,
 I guess and *fear*.”

At Ellisland his colley bore on his collar, “ Robert Burns, poet ;” and on his removal to Dumfries, we know that he indulged the dream of devoting all his leisure time to poetry—a dream how imperfectly realized ! Poor Johnson, an old Edinburgh friend, begged in his poverty help to his “ Museum,” and Thomson, not even an old Edinburgh acquaintance, in his pride—no ignoble pride—solicited it for his “ Collection ;” and fired by the thought of embellishing the body of Scottish song, he spurned the gentle and guarded proffer of remuneration in money, and set to work as he had done of yore in the spirit of love, assured from sweet experience that inspiration was its own reward. Sell a song ! as well sell a wild-flower plucked from a spring-bank at sun-rise. The one pervading feeling does indeed expand itself in a song, like a wild flower in the breath and dew of morning, which before was but a bud, and we are touched with a new sense of beauty at the full disclosure. As a song should always be simple, the flower we liken it to is the lily or the violet. The leaves of the lily are white, but it is not a monotonous whiteness—the leaves of the violet, sometimes “ dim as the lids of Cytherea’s eyes ”—for Shakspeare has said so—are, when well and happy, blue as her eyes themselves, while they looked languishingly on Adonis. Yet the exquisite color seems of different shades in its rarest richness ; and even so as

lily or violet shiftingly the same, should be a song in its simplicity, variously tinged with fine distinctions of the one color of that pervading feeling—now brighter, now dimmer, as open and shut the valve of that mystery, the heart. Sell a song! No—no—said Burns—“You shall have hundreds for nothing—and we shall all sail down the stream of time together, now to merry, and now to sorrowful music, and the dwellers on its banks, as we glide by, shall bless us by name, and call us of the Immortals.”

It was in this way that Burns was beguiled by the remembrance of the inspirations of his youthful prime, into the belief that it would be absolutely sordid to write songs for money; and thus he continued for years to enrich others by the choicest products of his genius, himself remaining all the while, alas! too poor. The richest man in the town was not more regular in the settlement of his accounts, but sometimes on Saturday nights he had not wherewithal to pay the expenses of the week's subsistence, and had to borrow a pound note. He was more ready to lend one, and you know he died out of debt. But his family suffered privations it is sad to think of—though to be sure the children were too young to grieve, and soon fell asleep, and Jean was a cheerful creature, strong at heart, and proud of her famous Robin, the Poet of Scotland, whom the whole world admired, but she alone loved, and so far from ever upbraiding him, welcomed him at all hours to her arms and to her heart. It is all very fine talking about the delight he enjoyed in the composition of his matchless lyrics, and the restoration of all those faded and broken songs of other ages, burnished by a few touches of his hand to surpassing beauty; but what we lament is, that with the Poet it was not “No song, no supper,” but “No supper for any song”—that with an infatuation singular even in the history of the poetic tribe, he adhered to what he had resolved, in the face of distress which, had he chosen it, he could have changed into comfort, and by merely doing so as all others did, have secured a competency to his wife and children. Infatuation! It is too strong a word—therefore substitute some other weaker in expression of blame—nay, let it be—if so you will—some gentle term of praise and of pity; for in this most

selfish world, 'tis so rare to be of self utterly regardless, that the scorn of self may for a moment be thought a virtue, even when indulged to the loss of the tenderly beloved. Yet the great natural affections have their duties superior over all others between man and man; and he who sets them aside, in the generosity or the joy of genius, must frequently feel that by such dereliction he has become amenable to conscience, and in hours when enthusiasm is tamed by reflection, cannot escape the tooth of remorse.

How it would have kindled all his highest powers, to have felt assured that by their exercise in the Poet's own vocation he could not only keep want from his door "with stern alarum banishing sweet sleep," but clothe, lodge, and board "the wife and weans," as sumptuously as if he had been an absolute supervisor! In one article alone was he a man of expensive habits—it was quite a craze with him to have his Jean dressed *genteelly*—for she had a fine figure, and as she stepped along the green, you might have taken the matron for a maid, so light her foot, so animated her bearing, as if care had never imposed any burden on her not ungraceful shoulders heavier than the milk-pail she had learned at Mossiel to bear on her head. 'Tis said that she was the first in her rank at Dumfries to sport a gingham gown, and Burns's taste in ribands had been instructed by the rainbow. To such a pitch of extravagance had he carried his craze that when dressed for church, Mrs. Burns, it was conjectured, could not have had on her person much less than the value of two pounds sterling money, and the boys, from their dress and demeanor, you might have mistaken for a gentleman's sons. Then he resolved they should have the best education going; and the Hon. the Provost, the Bailies, and Town Council, he petitioned thus: "The literary taste and liberal spirit of your good town have so ably filled the various departments of your schools, as to make it a very great object for a parent to have his children educated in them; still, to me a stranger, with my large family, and very stinted income, to give my young ones that education I wish, at the high school fees which a stranger pays, will bear hard upon me. Some years ago your good town did me the honor of making me an honorary burgess, will you then

allow me to request, that this mark of distinction may extend so far as to put me on a footing of a real freeman in the schools?" Had not "his income been so stinted," we know how he would have spent it.

Then the world—the gracious and grateful world—"wondered and of wondering found no end," how and why it happened that Burns was publishing no more poems. What was he about? Had his genius deserted him? Was the vein wrought out? of fine ore indeed, but thin, and now there was but rubbish. His contributions to Johnson were not much known, and but some six of his songs in the first half part of Thomson appeared during his life. But what if he had himself given to the world, through the channel of the regular trade, and for his own behoof, in Parts, or all at once, *THOSE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY SONGS*—new and old—original and restored—with all those disquisitions, annotations, and ever so many more, themselves often very poetry indeed—what would the world have felt, thought, said, and done then? She would at least not have believed that the author of the *Cottar's Saturday Night* was—a drunkard. And what would Burns have felt, thought, said, and done then? He would have felt that he was turning his divine gift to a sacred purpose—he would have thought well of himself, and in that just appreciation there would have been peace—he would have said thousands on thousands of high and noble sentiments in discourses and in letters, with an untroubled voice and a steady pen, the sweet persuasive eloquence of the happy—he would have done greater things than it had before entered into his heart to conceive—his drama of the *Bruce* would have come forth magnificent from an imagination elevated by the joy that was in his heart—his *Scottish Georgics* would have written themselves, and would have been pure *Virgilian*—*Tale upon Tale*, each a day's work or a week's, would have taken the shine out of *Tam o' Shanter*.

And here it is incumbent on us to record our sentiments regarding Mr. Thomson's conduct towards Burns in his worst extremity, which has not only been assailed by "anonymous scribblers," whom perhaps he may rightly regard with contempt; but as he says in his letter to our esteemed friend, the ingenious

and energetic Robert Chambers, to "his great surprise, by some writers who might have been expected to possess sufficient judgment to see the matter in its true light."

In the "melancholy letter received through Mrs. Hyslop," as Mr. Thomson well calls it, dated April, Burns writes, "Alas! my dear Thomson, I fear it will be some time before I tune my lyre again. 'By Babel streams I have sat and wept,' almost ever since I wrote you last (in February, when he thanked Mr. Thomson for 'a handsome elegant present to Mrs. B——,' we believe a worsted shawl). I have only known existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of sickness, and have counted time but by the repercussions of pain. Rheumatism, cold, and fever, have formed to me a terrible combination. I close my eyes in misery, and open them without hope." In his answer to that letter, dated 4th May, Mr. Thomson writes, "I need not tell you, my good sir, what concern your last gave me, and how much I sympathize in your sufferings. But do not, I beseech you, give yourself up to despondency, nor speak the language of despair. The vigor of your constitution, I trust, will soon set you on your feet again; and *then it is to be hoped you will see the wisdom of taking due care of a life so valuable to your family, to your friends, and to the world.* Trusting that your next will bring agreeable accounts of your convalescence, and good spirits, I remain with sincere regard, yours." This is kind as it should be; and the advice given to Burns is good, though perhaps, under the circumstances, it might just as well have been spared. In a subsequent letter without date, Burns writes, "I have great hopes that the genial influence of the approaching summer will set me to rights, but as yet I cannot boast of returning health. I have now reason to believe that my complaint is a flying gout; a sad business." Then comes that most heart-rending letter, in which the dying Burns, in terror of a jail, implores the loan of five pounds—and the well-known reply. "Ever since I received your melancholy letter by Mrs. Hyslop, I have been ruminating in what manner I could endeavor to alleviate your sufferings," and so on. Shorter rumination than of *three months* might, one would think, have sufficed to mature some plan for the alleviation of such sufferings, and human ingenuity has been more severely

taxed than it would have been in devising means to carry it into effect. The recollection of a letter written *three years before*, when the Poet was in high health and spirits, needed not to have stayed his hand. "The fear of offending your independent spirit," seems a bugbear indeed. "With great pleasure I enclose a draft for *the very sum I had proposed sending!!* Would I were CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER but for one day for your sake!!!"

Josiah Walker, however, to whom Mr. Thomson gratefully refers, says, "a few days before Burns expired, he applied to Mr. Thomson for a loan of £5, in a note which showed the irritable and distracted state of his mind, and his commendable judgment instantly remitted the precise sum, foreseeing that had he, at that moment, presumed to exceed that request, he would have exasperated the irritation and resentment of the haughty invalid, and done him more injury, by agitating his passions, than could be repaired by administering more largely to his wants." Haughty invalid! Alas! he was humble enough now. "After all my boasted independence, *stern necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds!*" Call not that a pang of pride. It is the outcry of a wounded spirit shrinking from the last worst arrow of affliction. In one breath he implores succor and forgiveness from the man to whom he had been a benefactor. "*Forgive me this earnestness—but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. FORGIVE ME! FORGIVE ME!*" He asks no gift—he but begs to borrow—and trusts to the genius God had given him for ability to repay the loan; nay, he encloses his *last song*, "Fairest Maid on Devon's banks," as in part payment! But oh! save Robert Burns from dying in prison. What hauteur! And with so "haughty an invalid," how shall a musical brother deal, so as not "to exasperate his irritation and resentment," and do him "more injury by agitating his passions, than could be repaired by administering more largely to his wants? *More largely!* Faugh! faugh! Foreseeing that he who was half-mad at the horrors of a jail, would go wholly mad were ten pounds sent to him instead of five, which was all "the haughty invalid" had implored, "with commendable judgment," according to Josiah Walker's philosophy of human life, George Thom-

son sent "the precise sum!" And supposing it had gone into the pocket of the merciless haberdasher, on what did Josiah Walker think would "the haughty invalid" have subsisted *then*—how paid for lodging without board by the melancholy Solway-side?

Mr. Thomson's champion proceeds to say—"Burns had all the unmanageable pride of Samuel Johnson, *and if the latter threw away with indignation the new shoes which had been placed at his chamber door, secretly and collectively by his companions*, the former would have been still more ready to resent any pecuniary donation which a single individual, after his peremptory prohibition, should avowedly have dared to insult him with." In Boswell we read—"Mr. Bateman's lectures were so excellent that Johnson used to come and get them at second-hand from Taylor, till his poverty being so extreme, that his shoes were worn out, and his feet appeared through them, he saw that his humiliating condition was perceived by the Christ-Church men, and he came no more. He was too proud to accept of money, *and somebody having set a pair of new shoes at his door*, he threw them away with indignation." Hall, Master of Pembroke, in a note on this passage, expresses strong doubts of Johnson's poverty at college having been extreme; and Croker, with his usual accuracy, says, "authoritatively and circumstantially as this story is told, there is good reason for disbelieving it altogether. Taylor was admitted Commoner of Christ-Church, June 27, 1720; Johnson left Oxford six months before." Suppose it true. Had Johnson found the impudent cub in the act of depositing the eleemosynary shoes, he infallibly would have knocked him down with fist or folio as clean as he afterwards did Osborne. But Mr. Thomson was no such cub, nor did he stand relatively to Burns in the same position as such cub to Johnson. He owed Burns much money—though Burns would not allow himself to think so; and had he expostulated, with open heart and hand, with the Bard on his obstinate—he might have kindly said foolish and worse than foolish disregard not only of his own interest, but of the comfort of his wife and family—had he gone to Dumfries for the sole purpose—who can doubt that "his justice and generosity" would have been crowned with success?

Who but Josiah Walker could have said, that Burns would have *then* thought himself insulted? Resent a "pecuniary donation" indeed! What is a donation? Johnson tells us in the words of South; "After donation there is an absolute change and alienation made of the property of the thing given; which, being alienated, a man has no more to do with it than with a thing bought with another's money." It was Burns who made a donation to Thomson of a hundred and twenty songs.

All mankind must agree with Mr. Lockhart when he says—"Why Burns, who was of opinion, when he wrote his letter to Mr. Carfrae, that 'no profits were more honorable than those of the labors of a man of genius,' and whose own notions of independence had sustained no shock in the receipt of hundreds of pounds from Creech, should have spurned the suggestion of pecuniary recompense from Mr. Thomson, it is no easy matter to explain; nor do I profess to understand why Mr. Thomson took so little pains to argue the matter *in limine* with the poet, and convince him that the time which he himself considered as fairly entitled to be paid for by a common bookseller, ought of right to be valued and acknowledged by the editor and proprietor of a book containing both songs and music." We are not so much blaming the backwardness of Thomson in the matter of the songs, as we are exposing the *blather* of Walker in the story of the shoes. Yet something there is in the nature of the whole transaction that nobody can stomach. We think we have in a great measure explained how it happened that Burns "spurned the suggestion of pecuniary recompense;" and bearing our remarks in mind, look for a moment at the circumstances of the case. Mr. Thomson, in his first letter, September, 1792, says, "*Profit is quite a secondary consideration with us*, and we are resolved to spare neither pains nor expense on the publication." "We shall esteem your poetical assistance a particular favor, besides paying *any reasonable price* you shall please demand for it." And would Robert Burns condescend to receive money for his contributions to a work in honor of Scotland, undertaken by men with whom "profit was quite a secondary consideration?" Impossible. In July, 1793, when Burns had been for nine months enthusiastically co-operating in a great national work, and had

proved that he would carry it on to a triumphant close, Mr. Thomson writes—"I cannot express how much I am obliged to you for the exquisite new songs you are sending me; but thanks, my friend, are a poor return for what you have done. As I shall be benefited by the publication, you must suffer me to inclose a small mark of my gratitude, and to repeat it afterwards *when I find it convenient*. Do not return it—for BY HEAVEN if you do, *our correspondence is at an end*." A bank-note for five pounds! "In the name of the prophet—FIGS! Burns, with a proper feeling, retained the trifle, but forbade the repetition of it; and everybody must see, at a glance, that such a man could not have done otherwise—for it would have been most degrading indeed had he shown himself ready to accept a five pound note when it might happen to suit the convenience of an Editor. His domicile was not in Grub-street.

Mr. Walker, still further to soothe Mr. Thomson's feelings, sent him an extract from a letter of Lord Woodhouselee's—"I am glad that you have embraced the occasion which lay in your way of doing full justice to Mr. George Thomson, who I agree with you in thinking, was most harshly and illiberally treated by an anonymous dull calumniator. I have always regarded Mr. Thomson as a man of great worth and most respectable character; and I have every reason to believe that poor Burns felt *himself as much indebted to his good counsels and active friendship as a man, as the public is sensible he was to his good taste and judgment as a critic*." Mr. Thomson, in now giving, for the first time, this extract to the public, says, "Of the unbiassed opinion of such a highly respectable gentleman and accomplished writer as Lord Woodhouselee, I certainly feel not a little proud. It is of itself more than sufficient to silence the calumnies by which I have been assailed, first anonymously, and afterwards, to my great surprise, by some writers who might have been expected to possess sufficient judgment to see the matter in its true light." He has reason to feel proud of his Lordship's good opinion, and on the ground of his private character he deserved it. But the assertions contained in the extract have no bearing whatever on the question, and they are entirely untrue. Lord Woodhouselee could have had no authority for believing, "that

poor Burns felt himself indebted to Mr. Thomson's good counsels and active friendship as a man." Mr. Thomson, a person of no influence or account, had it not in his power to exert any "active friendship" for Burns—and as to "good counsels," it is not to be believed for a moment, that a modest man like him, who had never interchanged a word with Burns, would have presumed to become his Mentor. This is putting him forward in the high character of Burns's benefactor, not only in his worldly concerns, but in his moral well-being; a position which of himself he never could have dreamt of claiming, and from which he must, on a moment's consideration, with pain inexpressible recoil. Neither is "the public sensible" that Burns was "indebted to his good taste and judgment as a critic." The public kindly regard Mr. Thomson, and think that in his correspondence with Burns he makes a respectable figure. But Burns repudiated most of his critical strictures; and the worthy Clerk of the Board of Trustees does indeed frequently fall into sad mistakes, concerning alike poetry, music, and painting. Lord Woodhouselee's "unbiassed opinion," then, so far from being of itself "sufficient to silence the calumnies of ignorant assailants, &c.," is not worth a straw.

Mr. Thomson, in his five pound letter, asks—"Pray, my good sir, is it not possible for you to *muster a volume of poetry*?" Why, with the assistance of Messrs. Johnson and Thomson, it would have been possible; and then Burns might have called in his "Jolly Beggars." "If too much trouble to you," continues Mr. Thomson, "in the present state of your health, some literary friend might be found here who would select and arrange your manuscripts, and take upon him the *task of editor*. In the meantime, it could be advertised to be published by subscription. Do not shun this mode of obtaining the value of your labor; remember Pope published the *Iliad* by subscription." Why, had not Burns published his own poems by subscription! All this seems the strangest mockery ever heard of; yet there can be no doubt that it was written not only with a serious face, but with a kind heart. But George Thomson at that time was almost as poor a man as Robert Burns. Allan Cuninghame, a man of genius and virtue, in his interesting *Life of Burns*, has in

his characteristic straight-forward style put the matter—in as far as regards the money remittance—in its true light, and all Mr. Thomson's friends should be thankful to him—"Thomson instantly complied with the request of Burns; he borrowed a five-pound note from Cunningham (a draft), and sent it saying, he had made up his mind to inclose the identical sum the poet had asked for, when he received his letter. For this he has been sharply censured; and his defence is, that he was afraid of sending more, lest he should offend the pride of the poet, who was uncommonly sensitive in pecuniary matters. A better defence is Thomson's own poverty; only one volume of his splendid work was then published; his outlay had been beyond his means, and very small sums of money had come in to cover his large expenditure. Had he been richer, his defence would have been a difficult matter. When Burns made the stipulation, his hopes were high, and the dread of hunger or of the jail was far from his thoughts; he imagined that it became genius to refuse money in a work of national importance. But his situation grew gloomier as he wrote; he had lost nearly his all in Ellisland, and was obliged to borrow small sums, which he found a difficulty in repaying. That he was in poor circumstances was well known to the world; and had money been at Thomson's disposal, a way might have been found of doing the poet good by stealth: he sent five pounds, because he could not send ten, and it would have saved him from some sarcastic remarks, and some pangs of heart, had he said so at once."

Mr. Thomson has attempted a defence of himself about once every seven years, but has always made the matter worse, by putting it on wrong grounds. In a letter to that other Arcadian, Josiah Walker, he says—many years ago—"Now, the fact is, that notwithstanding the united labors of all the men of genius who have enriched my Collection, I am not even *yet compensated for the precious time consumed by me in poring over musty volumes, and in corresponding with every amateur and poet, by whose means I expected to make any valuable addition to our national music and song*;—for the exertion and money it cost me to obtain accompaniments from the greatest masters of harmony in Vienna; and for the sums paid to engravers, printers, and others.'

Let us separate the items of this account. The money laid out by him must stand by itself—and for that outlay, he had then been compensated by the profits of the sale of the Collection. Those profits, we do not doubt, had been much exaggerated by public opinion, but they had then been considerable and have since been great. Our undivided attention has therefore to be turned to “his precious time consumed,” and to its inadequate compensation. And the first question that naturally occurs to every reader to ask himself is—“in what sense are we to take the terms ‘time,’ ‘precious,’ and ‘consumed?’” Inasmuch as “time” is only another word for life, it is equally “precious” to all men. Take it then to mean leisure hours, in which men seek for relaxation and enjoyment. Mr. Thomson tells us that he was, from early youth, an enthusiast in music and in poetry; and it puzzles us to conceive what he means by talking of “his precious time being consumed” in such studies. To an enthusiast, a “musty volume” is a treasure beyond the wealth of Ind—to pore over “musty volumes” sweet as to gaze on melting eyes—he hugs them to his heart. They are their own exceeding great reward—and we cannot listen to any claim for pecuniary compensation. Then who ever heard, before or since, of an enthusiast in poetry avowing before the world, that he had not been sufficiently compensated in money, “for the precious time consumed by him in corresponding with Poets?” Poets are proverbially an irritable race; still there is something about them that makes them very engaging—and we cannot bring ourselves to think that George Thomson’s “precious time consumed” in corresponding with Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Campbell, Joanna Baillie, and the Ettrick Shepherd, deserved “compensation.” As to amateurs, we mournfully grant they are burthensome; yet even that burthen may uncomplainingly be borne by an Editor who “expects by their means to make any valuable addition to our national music and song;” and it cannot be denied, that the creatures have often good ears, and turn off tolerable verses. Finally, if by “precious” he means valuable, in a Politico Economical sense, we do not see how Mr. Thomson’s time could have been consumed more productively to himself; nor indeed how he could have made any money at all by a different employment of

it. In every sense, therefore, in which the words are construed, they are equally absurd ; and all who read them are forced to think of one whose "precious time was indeed consumed"—to his fatal loss—the too generous, the self-devoted Burns—but for whose "uncompensated exertions," "The Melodies of Scotland" would have been to the Editor a ruinous concern, in place of one which for nearly half a century must have been yielding him a greater annual income than the Poet would have enjoyed had he been even a Supervisor.

Mr. Thomson has further put forth in his letter to Robert Chalmers, and not now for the first time, this most injudicious defence. "Had I been a selfish or avaricious man, I had a fair opportunity, upon the death of the poet, to put money in my pocket ; for I might then have published, for my own behoof, all the beautiful lyrics he had written for me, the original manuscripts of which were in my possession. But instead of doing this, I was no sooner informed that the friends of the poet's family had come to a resolution to collect his works, and to publish them, for the benefit of the family, and that they thought it of importance to include my MSS. as being likely, from their number, their novelty, and their beauty, to prove an attraction to subscribers, than I felt it my duty to put them at once in possession of all the songs, and of the correspondence between the poet and myself ; and accordingly, through Mr. John Syme of Ryedale, I transmitted the whole to Dr. Currie, who had been prevailed on, immensely to the advantage of Mrs. Burns and her children, to take on himself the task of editor. For this surrendering the manuscripts, I received both verbally and in writing, the warm thanks of the trustees for the family—Mr. John Syme and Mr. Gilbert Burns—who considered what I had done as a fair return for the poet's generosity of conduct to me." Of course he retained the exclusive right of publishing the songs with the music in his Collection. Now, what if he had refused to surrender the manuscripts ? The whole world would have accused him of robbing the widow and orphan, and he would have been hooted out of Scotland. George Thomson, rather than have done so, would have suffered himself to be pressed to death between two mill-stones ; and yet he not only instances his having "surrendered the MSS. as a

proof of the calumnious nature of the abuse with which he had been assailed by anonymous scribblers, but is proud of the thanks of "the trustees of the family, who considered what I had done as a *fair return* for the poet's generosity of conduct to me." Setting aside, then, "the calunnies of anonymous scribblers," with one and all of which we are unacquainted, we have shown that Josiah Walker, in his foolish remarks on this affair, whereby he outraged the common feelings of humanity, left his friend just where he stood before—that Lord Woodhouselee knew nothing whatever about the matter, and in his good nature has made assertions absurdly untrue—that Mr. Thomson's own defence of himself is in all respects an utter failure, and mainly depends on the supposition of a case unexampled in a Christian land—that Lockhart with unerring finger has indicated where the fault lay—and that Cuninghame has accounted for it by a reason that with candid judges must serve to reduce it to one of a very pardonable kind ; the avowal of which from the first, would have saved a worthy man from some unjust obloquy, and at least as much undeserved commendation—the truth being now apparent to all, that "his poverty, not his will, consented" to secure on the terms of non-payment, a hundred and twenty songs from the greatest lyrical poet of his country, who during the years he was thus lavishing away the effusions of his matchless genius, without fee or reward, was in a state bordering on destitution, and as the pen dropt from his hand, did not leave sufficient to defray the expenses of a decent funeral.

We come now to contemplate his dying days ; and mournful as the contemplation is, the close of many an illustrious life has been far more distressing, involved in far thicker darkness, and far heavier storms. From youth he had been visited—we shall not say haunted—by presentiments of an early death ; he knew well that the profound melancholy that often settled down upon his whole being, suddenly changing day into night, arose from his organization ;—and it seems as if the finest still bordered on disease—disease in his case perhaps hereditary—for his father was often sadder than even "the toil-worn cottar" needed to be, and looked like a man subject to inward trouble. His character was somewhat stern ; and we can believe that in its austerity he

found a safeguard against passion, that nevertheless may shake the life it cannot wreck. But the son wanted the father's firmness; and in his veins there coursed more impetuous blood. The very fire of genius consumed him, coming and going in fitful flashes; his genius itself may almost be called a passion, so vehement was it, and so turbulent—though it had its scenes of blissful quietude; his heart too seldom suffered itself to be at rest; many a fever travelled through his veins; his calmest nights were liable to be broken in upon by the worst of dreams—waking dreams from which there is no deliverance in a sudden start—of which the misery is felt to be no delusion—which are not dispelled by the morning light, but accompany their victim as he walks out into the day, and among the dew, and surrounded as he is with the beauty of rejoicing nature, tempt him to curse the day he was born.

Yet let us not call the life of Burns unhappy—nor at its close shut our eyes to the manifold blessings showered by heaven on the Poet's lot. Many of the mental sufferings that helped most to wear him out, originated in his own restless nature—"by prudent, cautious, self-control" he might have subdued some and tempered others—better regulation was within his power—and, like all men, he paid the penalty of neglect of duty, or of its violation. But what loss is hardest to bear? The loss of the beloved. All other wounds are slight to those of the affections. Let Fortune do her worst—so that Death be merciful. Burns went to his own grave without having been commanded to look down into another's where all was buried. "I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too, and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her." The flower withered, and he wept—but his four pretty boys were soon dancing again in their glee—their mother's heart was soon composed again to cheerfulness—and her face without a shadow. Anxiety for their sakes did indeed keep preying on his heart;—but what would that anxiety have seemed to him, had he been called upon to look back upon it in anguish *because they were not*? Happiness too great for this earth! If in a

dream for one short hour restored, that would have been like an hour in heaven.

Burns had not been well for a twelvemonth; and though nobody seems even then to have thought him dying, on the return of spring, which brought him no strength, he knew that his days were numbered. Intense thought, so it be calm, is salutary to life. It is emotion that shortens our days by hurrying life's pulsations—till the heart can no more, and runs down like a disordered time-piece. We said nobody seems to have thought him dying;—yet after the event everybody, on looking back on it, remembered seeing death in his face. It is when thinking of those many months of decline and decay, that we feel pity and sorrow for his fate, and that along with them other emotions will arise, without our well knowing towards whom, or by what name they should be called, but partaking of indignation, and shame, and reproach, as if some great wrong had been done, and might have been rectified before death came to close the account. Not without blame somewhere could such a man have been so neglected—so forgotten—so left alone to sicken and die.

“Oh, Scotia! my dear, my native soil,
For whom my warmest wish to heaven is sent!
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content!”

No son of Scotland did ever regard her with more filial affection—did ever in strains so sweet sing of the scenes “that make her loved at home, revered abroad”—and yet his mother stretched not out her hand to sustain—when it was too late to save—her own Poet as he was sinking into an untimely grave. But the dying man complained not of her ingratitude—he loved her too well to the last to suspect her of such sin—there was nothing for him to forgive—and he knew that he would have a place for ever in her memory. Her rulers were occupied with great concerns—in which *all thoughts of self were merged!* and therefore well might they forget her Poet, who was but a cottar's son and a gauger. In such forgetfulness they were what other rulers have been, and will be,—and Coleridge lived to know that the great ones of his own land could be as heartless in his own

case as the "Scotch nobility" in that of Burns, for whose brows his youthful genius wove a wreath of scorn. "The rapt one of the godlike forenead, the heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth"—but who among them cared for the long self-seclusion of the white-headed sage—for his sick bed, or his grave?

Turn we then from the Impersonation named Scotland—from her rulers—from her nobility and gentry—to the personal friends of Burns. Could they have served him in his straits? And how? If they could, then were they bound to do so by a stricter obligation than lay upon any other party; and if they had the will as well as the power, 'twould have been easy to find a way. The duties of friendship are plain, simple, sacred—and to perform them is delightful; yet, so far as we can see, they were not performed here—if they were, let us have the names of the beneficent who visited Burns every other day during the months disease had deprived him of all power to follow his calling? Who insisted on helping to keep the family in comfort till his strength might be restored? For example, to pay his house rent for a year? Mr. Syme, of Ryedale, told Dr. Currie, that Burns had "many firm friends in Dumfries," who would not have suffered the haberdasher to put him into jail, and that his were the fears of a man in delirium. Did not those "firm friends" know that he was of necessity very poor? And did any one of them offer to lend him thirty shillings to pay for his three weeks' lodgings at the Brow? He was not in delirium—till within two days of his death. Small sums he had occasionally borrowed and repaid; but from people as poor as himself; such as kind Craig, the schoolmaster, to whom, at his death, he owed a pound—never from the more opulent townfolk or the gentry in the neighborhood, of not one of whom is it recorded that he or she accommodated the dying Poet with a loan sufficient to pay for a week's porridge and milk. Let us have no more disgusting palaver about his pride. His heart would have melted within him at any act of considerate friendship done to his family; and so far from feeling that by accepting it he had become a pauper, he would have recognized in the doer of it a brother, and taken him into his heart. And had he not in all the earth, one single such Friend? His brother Gilbert

was struggling with severe difficulties at Mossgiel, and was then unable to assist him; and his excellent cousin at Montrose had enough to do to maintain his own family; but as soon as he knew how matters stood, he showed that the true Burns' blood was in his heart, and after the Poet's death, was as kind as man could be to his widow and children.

What had come over Mrs. Dunlop that she should have seemed to have forgotten or forsaken him? "*These many months* you have been two packets in my debt—what sin of ignorance I have committed against so highly valued a friend I am utterly at a loss to guess! Alas! Madam, ill can I afford, at this time, to be deprived of any of the small remnant of my pleasures. * * * I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock (the death of his little daughter), when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until, after many weeks of a sick bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once, indeed, have been before my own door in the street." No answer came; and three months after he wrote from the Brow, "Madam—I have written you so often without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourne whence no traveller returns*. Your friendship, with which for many years you honored me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell. R. B." Currie says, "Burns had the pleasure of receiving a satisfactory explanation of his friend's silence, and an assurance of the continuance of her friendship to his widow and children; an assurance that has been amply fulfilled. That "satisfactory explanation" should have been given to the world—it should be given yet—for without it such incomprehensible silence must continue to seem cruel; and it is due to the memory of one whom Burns loved

and honored to the last, to vindicate on her part the faithfulness of the friendship which preserves her name.

Maria Riddel, a lady of fine talents and accomplishments, and though somewhat capricious in the consciousness of her mental and personal attractions, yet of most amiable disposition, and of an affectionate and tender heart, was so little aware of the condition of the Poet, whose genius she could so well appreciate, that only a few weeks before his death, when he could hardly crawl, he had by letter to decline acceding to her "desire that he would go to the birth-day assembly, on the 4th June, to *show his loyalty!*" Alas! he was fast "wearin' awa to the land o' the leal;" and after the lapse of a few weeks, that lady gay, herself in poor health, and saddened out of such vanities by sincerest sorrow, was struck with his appearance on entering the room. "The stamp of death was imprinted on his features. He seemed already touching the brink of eternity. His first salutation was—'Well, Madam, have you any commands for the next world?'" The best men have indulged in such sallies, on the brink of the grave. Nor has the utterance of words like these, as life's taper was flickering in the socket, been felt to denote a mood of levity unbecoming a creature about to go to his account. On the contrary, there is something very affecting in the application of such formulas of speech as had been of familiar use all his days, on his passage through the shadow of time, now that his being is about to be liberated into the light of eternity, where our mortal language is heard not, and spirit communicates with spirit through organs not made of clay, having dropped the body like a garment.

In that interview, the last recorded, and it is recorded well—pity so much should have been suppressed—"he spoke of his death without any of the ostentation of philosophy, but with firmness as well as feeling, as an event likely to happen very soon, and which gave him concern chiefly from leaving his poor children so young and unprotected, and his wife in so interesting a situation, in hourly expectation of lying in of a fifth." Yet, during the whole afternoon, he was cheerful, even gay, and disposed for pleasantry; such is the power of the human voice and the human eye over the human heart, almost to the re-

suscitation of drowned hope, when they are both suffused with affection, when tones are as tender as tears, yet can better hide the pity that ever and anon will be gushing from the lids of grief. He expressed deep contrition for having been betrayed by his inferior nature and vicious sympathy with the dissolute, into impurities in verse, which he knew were floating about among people of loose lives, and might on his death be collected to the hurt of his moral character. Never had Burns been "hired minstrel of voluptuous blandishment," nor by such unguarded freedom of speech had he ever sought to corrupt; but emulating the ribald wit and coarse humor of some of the worst old ballants current among the lower orders of the people, of whom the moral and religious are often tolerant of indecencies to a strange degree, he felt that he had sinned against his genius. A miscreant, aware of his poverty, had made him an offer of fifty pounds for a collection, which he repelled with the horror of remorse. Such things can hardly be said to have existence; the polluted perishes, or shovelled aside from the socialities of mirthful men, are nearly obsolete, except among those whose thoughtlessness is so great as to be sinful, among whom the distinction ceases between the weak and the wicked. From such painful thoughts he turned to his poetry, that had every year been becoming dearer and dearer to the people, and he had comfort in the assurance that it was pure and good; and he wished to live a little longer that he might mend his Songs, for through them he felt he would survive in the hearts of the dwellers in cottage-homes all over Scotland; and in the fond imagination of his heart Scotland to him was all the world.

"He spoke of his death without any of the ostentation of philosophy," and perhaps without any reference to religion; for dying men often keep their profoundest thoughts to themselves, except in the chamber in which they believe they are about to have the last look of the objects of their earthly love, and there they give them utterance in a few words of hope and trust. While yet walking about in the open air, and visiting their friends, they continue to converse about the things of this life in language so full of animation, that you might think, but for something about their eyes, that they are unconscious of their doom;

and so at times they are ; for the customary pleasure of social intercourse does not desert them ; the sight of others well and happy beguiles them of the mournful knowledge that their own term has nearly expired, and in that oblivion they are cheerful as the persons seem to be who for their sakes assume a smiling aspect in spite of struggling tears. So was it with Burns at the Brow. But he had his Bible with him in his lodgings, and he read it almost continually—often when seated on a bank, from which he had difficulty in rising without assistance, for his weakness was extreme, and in his emaciation he was like a ghost. The fire of his eye was not dimmed—indeed fever had lighted it up beyond even its natural brightness ; and though his voice, once so various, was now hollow, his discourse was still that of a Poet. To the last he loved the sunshine, the grass, and the flowers ; to the last he had a kind look and word for the passers-by, who all knew it was Burns. Laboring men, on their way from work, would step aside to the two or three houses called the Brow, to know if there was any hope of his life ; and it is not to be doubted that devout people remembered him, who had written the Cottar's Saturday Night, in their prayers. His sceptical doubts no longer troubled him ; they had never been more than shadows ; and he had at last the faith of a confiding Christian. We are not even to suppose that his heart was always disquieted within him because of the helpless condition of his widow and orphans. That must have been indeed with him a dismal day on which he wrote three letters about them so full of anguish ; but to give vent to grief in passionate outcries usually assuages it, and tranquillity sometimes steals upon despair. His belief that he was so sunk in debt was a delusion—not of delirium, but of the fear that is in love. And comfort must have come to him in the conviction that his country would not suffer the family of her Poet to be in want. As long as he had health they were happy, though poor ; as long as he was alive, they were not utterly destitute. That on his death they would be paupers, was a dread that could have had no abiding place in a heart that knew how it had beat for Scotland, and in the power of genius had poured out all its love on her fields and her people. His heart was pierced with the same wounds that extort lamen-

tations from the death-beds of ordinary men, thinking of what will become of wife and children ; but like the pouring of oil upon them by some gracious hand, must have been the frequent recurrence of the belief—"On my death people will pity them, and care for them for my name's sake." Some little matter of money he knew he should leave behind him—the two hundred pounds he had lent to his brother ; and it sorely grieved him to think that Gilbert might be ruined by having to return it. What brotherly affection was there ! They had not met for a good many years ; but personal intercourse was not required to sustain their friendship. At the Brow often must the dying Poet have remembered Mossgiel.

On the near approach of death he returned to his own house, in a spring-cart ; and having left it at the foot of the street, he could just totter up to his door. The last words his hand had strength to put on paper were to his wife's father, and were written probably within an hour of his return home. "My dear Sir—Do, for heaven's sake, send Mrs. Armour here immediately. My wife is hourly expected to be put to bed ! Good God ! what a situation for her to be in, poor girl, without a friend ! I returned from sea-bathing quarters to-day ; and my medical friends would almost persuade me that I am better ; but I think and feel that my strength is so gone, that the disorder will prove fatal to me. Your son-in-law, R. B." That is not the letter of a man in delirium ; nor was the letter written a few days before from the Brow to "my dearest love." But next day he was delirious, and the day after too, though on being spoken to he roused himself into collected and composed thought, and was, ever and anon, for a few minutes himself—Robert Burns. In his delirium there was nothing to distress the listeners and the lookers on ; words were heard that to them had no meaning ; mistakings made by the parting spirit among its language now in confusion breaking up ; and sometimes words of trifling import about trifling things—about incidents and events unnoticed in their happening, but now strangely cared for in their final repassing before the closed eyes just ere the dissolution of the dream of a dream. Nor did his death-bed want for affectionate and faithful service. The few who were

privileged to tend it did so tenderly and reverently—now by the side of the sick wife, and now by that of the dying husband. Maxwell, a kind physician, came often to gaze in sadness where no skill could relieve. Findlater, supervisor of excise, sat by his bed-side the night before he died; and Jessie Lewars, daughter and sister of a gauger, was his sick nurse. Had he been her own father, she could not have done her duty with a more perfect devotion of her whole filial heart—and her name will never die, “here eternized on earth” by the genius of the Poet who, for all her Christian kindness to him and his, had long cherished toward her the tenderest gratitude. His children had been taken care of by friends, and were led in to be near him, now that his hour was come. His wife in her own bed knew it, as soon as her Robert was taken from her; and the great Poet of the Scottish people, who had been born “in the auld clay biggin” on a stormy winter night, died in an humble tenement on a bright summer morning, among humble folk, who composed his body, and according to custom strewed around it flowers brought from their own gardens.

Great was the grief of the people for their Poet’s death. They felt that they had lost their greatest man; and it is no exaggeration to say that Scotland was saddened on the day of his funeral. It is seldom that tears are shed even close to the grave beyond the inner circle that narrows round it; but that day there were tears in the eyes of many far off at their work, and that night there was silence in thousands of cottages that had so often heard his songs—how sweeter far than any other, whether mournfully or merrily to old accordant melodies they won their way into the heart! The people had always loved him; they best understood his character, its strength and its weakness. Not among them at any time had it been harshly judged, and they allowed him now the sacred privileges of the grave. The religious have done so ever since, pitying more than condemning, nor afraid to praise; for they have confessed to themselves, that had there been a window in their breasts as there was in that of Burns, worse sights might have been seen—a darker revelation. His country charged herself with the care of them he had loved so well, and the spirit in which she

performed her duty is the best proof that her neglect—if neglect at any time there were—of her Poet's well-being had not been wilful, but is to be numbered with those omissions incident to all human affairs, more to be lamented than blamed, and if not to be forgotten, surely to be forgiven, even by the nations who may have nothing to reproach themselves with in their conduct towards any of their great poets. England, “the foremost land of all this world,” was not slack to join in her sister's sorrow, and proved the sincerity of her own, not by barren words, but fruitful deeds, and best of all by fervent love and admiration of the poetry that had opened up so many delightful views into the character and condition of our “bold peasantry, their country's pride,” worthy compatriots with her own, and exhibiting in different Manners the same national Virtues.

No doubt wonder at a prodigy had mingled in many minds with admiration of the ploughman's poetry ; and when they of their wondering found an end, such persons began to talk with abated enthusiasm of his genius and increased severity of his character, so that during intervals of silence, an under current of detraction was frequently heard brawling with an ugly noise. But the main stream soon ran itself clear ; and Burns has no abusers now out of the superannuated list ; out of it—better still—he has no patrons. In our youth we have heard him spoken of by the big-wigs with exceeding condescension ; now the tallest men know that to see his features rightly they must look up. Shakspeare, Spencer, and Milton, are unapproachable ; but the present era is the most splendid in the history of our poetry—in England beginning with Cowper, in Scotland with Burns. Original and racy, each in his own land is yet unexcelled ; immovably they both keep their places—their inheritance is sure. Changes wide and deep, for better and for worse, have been long going on in town and country. There is now among the people more education—more knowledge than at any former day. Their worldly condition is more prosperous, while there is still among them a deep religious spirit. By that spirit alone can they be secured in the good, and saved from the evil of knowledge ; but the spirit of poetry is akin to that of religion, and the union of the two is in no human composition more

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